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SECOND EDEN

FLORENCE WARD

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Against the varied and unusual background of a mid-Western town where the energy and wealth following the war have brought about a conflict for leadership in financial, political and ethical situations, the author has created the powerful story of a group of people whose lives and happiness are dominated by the struggle. It is a rich and varied picture: Diana Wayne, the central figure of the book, is involved both by her affections and her restless desire to participate in the conflict. She finds herself a lone figure fighting desperately for her own happiness and the happiness of those who love her. She is baffled by her feminine inability to understand the motives of the men with whom she comes in contact. Defeated in the material struggle her fineness and her courageous acceptance of life win for her the love of a worthy man and a chance for a second Eden.

THE
SPECIAL NEWS

ES W. PAYNE
8 13th St. Place
Moines, 14, Iowa

ING CITIZEN
PUT IN
ITION

JAMES W. PAYNE
1328 13th St. Place
Des Moines, 14, Iowa

SECOND EDEN

FLORENCE WARD



PHYLLIS ANNE

THE SINGING HEART

THE FLAME OF HAPPINESS

SPREAD CIRCLES

Second Eden

BY
FLORENCE WARD



1928
MACRAE · SMITH · COMPANY
PUBLISHERS · PHILADELPHIA

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P H I L A D E L P H I A

MANUFACTURED
IN THE U. S. A.

To
STILLWATER
A REMEMBERED TOWN

SECOND EDEN

I

DIANA WAYNE stirred and turned on her pillow, her eyes opening slowly. Sunlight was spilling in watery ripples over the floor, a cool wind touched her cheek and through the open window she saw a branch of thick-leaved maple and the clean blue sky. She lay relaxed, drowsy and smiling. Some faint gladness, deep within her, was wakening her like a fine, far-off chime of bells, calling the new day. Something lovely was about to happen. . . .

Suddenly, she knew what it was. She sat up in bed, wide awake, and bent forward with her arms clasping her knees and her forehead pressed against them. How absurd she was! She laughed, a short chuckle like a boy's, deep in her throat, at her own absurdity. She could feel her breast rising and falling with her quick breathing. A throbbing excitement beat through her body because this day was at hand.

And, after all, it was an ordinary September day . . . no, it wasn't ordinary. She wouldn't have it so. Too many dreams, too many years of striving had gone to its making for this day to hold one prosaic hour. For a long time she had been climbing toward it along a hard, upward path, a path of her own choosing. It was like that path of the just. . . . (Did other women enclose emotional moments in these little jigsaw frames of remembered texts?) . . . which is as a shining light, more and more unto a perfect day. The incredible thing was that it was a perfect day without a cloud in the sky, with only the tang of autumn in the wind.

Her mind recorded with amusement the fact that to the rest of Anchorage its hours would slip along as usual. The new brick block destined to house The Anchorage *Journal* for the next twenty years, had been so long coming to completion that it was already established, a commonplace. It was merely one more in the group of sightly towers piling together at the heart of the town. When its doors opened that morning, people would saunter in only casually, just as they had visited the finished office-building of the Peoples' Trust Company, last fall, and celebrated the opening in the ball-room of the latest Hotel Anchorage. They would drift about the lobby, poke their heads into the editorial offices, climb to the composing-room with its extravagant skylights and battery of linotypes, stand in jostling groups before the basement windows, watching the big Goss press roll out the feature edition with which the *Journal* marked this milestone in its life. But not one person viewing the handsome structure of brick and steel would see what Diana Wayne saw: a structure within a structure, a shadowy tower built of young dreams and clear-edged ambitions, lifting straight and beautiful and lofty beyond its walls.

Not even her husband, she thought, or Kent Amlie felt quite as she felt about the coming day. Diana had not inquired how they felt. They had been for months involved in the building of the new plant and had said remarkably little; and she knew them well enough to let them alone. She had held her anticipation back, not letting herself think about it much, waiting to let rejoicing flood the final hours of consummation. Still, those two would understand her elation and share it, for they had shared all that led to it. The Anchorage *Journal* belonged to them, to Robert Wayne, to Kent Amlie, to Diana. They had built it together.

She slipped out of bed, in haste to bathe and dress. Through the half-open door, she could see into her husband's room, a plain, square room, littered with masculine belongings; with the shades lowered against the sun and a book sprawled on the carpet at the edge of the bed. Robert was still asleep, humped grotesquely under tumbled covers; and Diana closed the door soundlessly, moving with a winged quiet about her preparations for the day.

Her cool bath stimulated her and as she sat down at her dressing-table, a delicate glow was spreading through her body. She grinned at the woman in the glass, thinking that she looked like a flushed hoyden with her rumpled hair and color in her cheeks and that she must gather up some shreds of dignity before she faced the town. She had never mistaken herself for a beautiful woman. What she had was a chance radiance dependent on her mood, and just now its enchantment lay upon her. Her skin had a look of freshness, her eyes were clear and soft, her lips were darkly red, sensitive lips, sensuous and quick, with wilfulness in the tiny indentations that lifted the corners. It was always at her mouth that men looked first, and Diana knew that and enjoyed it with an impish amusement that she kept strictly to herself.

Her fingers sweeping over the jars and bottles lying on the glass surface of the table, she sent her thoughts through the already ordered events of the day. They would breakfast, as usual, at eight o'clock. Chris was leaving for school at the regular time and Bob would take the big car when he went downtown; for he was entertaining some out-of-town men at luncheon at the Anchorage Club. Her own day held a clear leisure. She had some extra ordering, but even with that, even though she lunched in town and spent most

of the day about the plant, watching wheels begin to whirl, she would have time for a long rest before dinner. She selected a filmy garment from the pile in a deep-drawer chest and took a frock from its hanger. Slipping into it, she told herself that she was dressing an hour too soon, that it was ridiculous to be up as early as this, absurd. Except that, somewhere, this day was waiting. . . .

She ran swiftly down the stairs. They were wide curved stairs, descending in an elliptical sweep to an irregularly-shaped hall. The door, the casement windows stood open. Diana swung about the newelpost and went into a study at the back of the house. Here, as she expected, she found her father-in-law, Peniel Wayne, in a winged chair close to a window. He rose at five, after a lifelong habit, to read his Bible. The Book lay on his knee but he was not reading it. He had the morning paper spread over it and was concentrated on a comic strip, pointing out successive squares with a veined finger. He looked up at Diana, still a little withdrawn in the abstraction she had surprised. Then he pushed the paper off to the floor.

"Ha, Diana. Well. You're down very early."

Diana laughed. "I woke early. I couldn't stay in bed. Don't let me disturb your devotions. I only wanted the paper." She stooped for it and flung him one of her fragmentary texts, "This is a day which the Lord hath made; we can rejoice and be glad in it."

Peniel did not answer. He was ruffling the pages of his Bible. . . . He read it through on a system which divided the chapters into three hundred and sixty parts and thus allowed him a week's holiday at Christmas . . . and with a small defensive cough, he craned his neck toward a Commentary, bound in shabby calfskin which lay on the window ledge beside him.

Diana dropped into a chair across the room. She held the paper as people with a passion for bridge handle cards, delicately, lightly, but with clinging fingertips. The smell of fresh printers' ink excited her, the tactual contact with heavy crackling sheets gave her a sensuous pleasure. Her eyes swept up the news, dwelt momentarily on a clever headline, skimmed an editorial, noted a half-dozen Associated Press items that the *Journal* had carried twelve hours earlier. She had always wished that the *Journal* could have been a morning paper, but with an edition of great metropolitan dailies mailed out from Chicago at midnight, the field was too competitive. They did well enough, Diana told herself. They gave news to a countryside forty miles square; and about it. The Anchorage *Journal* was one of the strongest papers in the state, a money-maker; but it was more than that. It was a power. . . . We've kept it clean, she said to herself, we can be proud of it. She dropped the newspaper, and stood up restlessly, looking down at Peniel.

He looked very much like an old schoolboy tucked away in the big chair. His spare narrow-shouldered figure occupied hardly half of it. He had thrown one lean knee over the other, and a hand slid between them, bent soberly over his Book, lifting his eyes at the proper places to the Commentary though he knew by heart what he would find in it. A patch of sunlight rested on his white hair. He had a fresh-colored face, a delicate, abstinent face, with a frugal glint of humor in the network of lines about the bright blueness of his eyes and a mouth hidden under a small white mustache. Diana was very fond of him.

For fifty years Peniel Wayne had struggled with a Congregational ministry. He had married his last year in Seminary on nothing better than a simple faith in

God for which he found immediate—and continuous—use. Of the mental pictures formed from his Bible reading, the clearest was that of Elijah fed by the ravens, and for years his most telling sermon dealt with five loaves and two fishes, a steadfast ode welling up from what secret anxieties Peniel himself hardly knew.

He had begun as a home missionary in the Dakota Territory; his three sons were born there and one had died in a May blizzard, thirty yards from the door of their solitary wind-thrashed cabin. He tithed the pittance he earned and provided tenderly for his family on what was left. He learned to eat very little, making sure, first, that the children had enough. He learned to kill game and to butcher the runty hogs with which his scattered parishioners made offering to the Lord, holding the knife steadily in his fragile hands, though he knew before it came the blood would make him deathly sick. He learned to make hideous little jokes over the barrels from the East whereby his family was clothed. The rubbish of the usual barrel, broken slippers, soiled corsets, old hats . . . no books, never a volume into which a man could set his teeth . . . and Miriam's inevitable quiet tears left Peniel gasping with shame that he was the object of charity such as this. He stood between Miriam and the grimmer realities of their life as a man might take on his own back the lashes of a whip in the hand of some monstrous slave-driver. He rode miles through storms and baking dust to visit the sick and comfort those that mourned. He lived through an Indian massacre. He did not lack courage.

Occasionally he asked himself if it weren't the only quality he could claim and just how useful it was. During his middle years he lived meagrely in a dozen

shabby manses. He was guilty of a delicate stammering in his sermons which eventually got on the nerves of the congregation and which increased sharply as soon as Peniel discovered it was offending. He loved books not wisely but too well and the invariable complaint that he neglected pastoral calls was true. He preached rare sermons based on a classical erudition that nobody understood; he blunted a rapier-like wit against stony minds and grew, in time, a little distrustful of humor. He could accept human frailty in a book but he had a kind of innocence which made him a little oblivious to sin in the flesh, and he had a weak-kneed tenderness with sinners. As he grew older, he was likely to retire, in a crisis, behind the barriers of remembered passages of poetry and become simply inattentive. It enraged a great many deacons.

He was lucky enough to hold a pastorate in a college town, when the time came to educate his sons, and these were his happiest years, though the subsequent call to a Chicago suburb where his salary was fifteen-hundred dollars marked the zenith of his career. At sixty-five . . . his stammering affecting the nerves of a wealthy pew-holder . . . Peniel slipped into a smaller parish where his wife died. At seventy, his congregation seemed suddenly to recede like a tide at ebb, leaving him a rather forlorn fisher of men on an arid shore; and he came with secret mortification, to Robert's house. He was self-effacing. He ate, with that life-long abstinence of his, almost nothing. He wanted nothing . . . except books. Only books. He read and read and read in a premature Heaven on Earth. . . .

Diana skewered a forefinger into the hollow of his shoulder.

"You are rejoicing, aren't you? Aren't you fairly bursting with pride in your son? I should be if it were Chris."

Peniel blinked gravely, "You chanting a matin of praise to Robert, Diana?"

"He's built this success for himself . . ."

"He's had Kent Amlie and you . . ."

"I've stood by to hand them the bricks and mortar, that's all. The new plant's a symbol of something . . . something fine and greater than it seems. Chris will build it greater still."

Peniel twinkled. "You never think of them separately. You're always confusing them in one person."

Diana rejected the idea indignantly, but an instant later she told herself it had a grain of truth. Her love for Chris was a part of her love for his father. To her Robert was still the young husband, the lover of the first months of their marriage, and the ways in which he leaned on her gave her feeling for him a maternal tenderness that swept in Chris, too, and made them one. I'm a lucky woman, she thought soberly, a happy woman . . . and turning away she opened the door and went out on a flagstone terrace.

It was shaded by the tall maples that grew thickly about the house. The lawns sloped toward the south to the rolling fairways of a golf course and the hedge of high shrubbery was broken at one corner by a swinging gate. From a sundial at the further end, Diana looked back at her house. It stood, ledge-stone and shingle, at the top of a gentle rise, flowing with the contour of the site, turning as the knoll descended with the curve of the ground. Diana had an intense satisfaction in it. The high sloping roof, broken by the tops of windows, like the roof of a Normandy farmhouse, the stone copings pillowed in lilac and boxwood,

the picturesque chimneys rising among the tree-tops stirred a sense of romance in her.

She had come back to the corner of the lawn when she saw a woman walking heavily up the drive and moved a little faster to meet her. A hundred feet apart they began smiling at each other.

"Well, Sue, how are you? You're early. Did you have to come as early as this?"

"If I get rolls started, Mis' Wayne, and the sherbet, I thought, maybe, I'd go home to get lunch. Angie'll be coming from school, hungry."

"She's in school this term, is she?" Diana murmured vaguely and, in a different tone, she said, "Put your basket on the step and come out for a look at the asters, Sue. The garden's like a prayer-rug from Persia."

Sue, who was hardly three years older than Diana, looked fifty. Her figure in a gingham dress and a shapeless black jacket was thick and wide-bosomed and she walked flatly, heavily.

"How many you got comin' for dinner, tonight, Mis' Wayne?"

"Twenty-four. And more men than women, it turns out . . . business friends of Mr. Wayne."

"You said fillet."

Diana nodded. "I've typewritten the menu for you. I had to send to Chicago for black mushrooms, Sue. Are you having a good run of parties this fall?"

"Pretty good. Five a week for October. I ain't complainin'."

They walked slowly back, looking at the mat of flowers, their shoes wet with dew.

"D'you remember the garden we planted that first spring at the little house?" asked Diana, "All those petunias splashing at the edge of things. D'you re-

member the sandbox you made when Chris and Angie were babies? I sometimes wonder what my life would have been if I hadn't had you those ten years."

Sue smiled. Her eyes, pale in her ruddy face, glowed.

"Differ'nt maybe. You'd made out, though, Mis' Wayne. You was a great hand to make out, somehow. I got peony roots from the old house. Thrifty. They grow good down to my place."

"You've the knack with flowers. There's some magic in you, Sue, when it comes to flowers and food and babies."

"I like fussing. I'm never so peaceful-like as outdoors. It's like I used to tell you, often . . . 'A garden soaks up all your tears.'" She turned restlessly, eager to get to work; but she hesitated, stooping to snap the head from a dandelion, "I'm bringing the three regulars for waiting," she said slowly, "And then, Angie. She . . . wanted to come."

"Angie?" Diana echoed, "Angie . . ."

"She's going on nineteen, Mis' Wayne, and a good waitress, the best I got, if she will. Mostly she won't and if she'll stay in school I don't worry her; she wanted to come here. 'You lemme help you at Waynes', Ma' she says, 'You lemme help there,' She wanted to come."

"How very nice of her," Diana said vaguely, but when she was alone a frown, like a faint cloud crossed her face.

She had known Sue nineteen years. Diana had breezed into the Anchorage station one morning after news and the agent had pointed out a pale, stout girl sitting stupidly in the corner of the waiting-room. "Been there since the three-forty 'smornin'." he said. "I can't get nothin' outa her. She just sits."

It took Diana twenty minutes to get a story out of

her. She was, she said, Mrs. Joe Bush, and her husband had just deserted her. They had come from Polk County down Tennessee-way and changed cars at St. Louis . . . was it only last night? . . . and some time later waking out of a sound sleep, she found that Joe was gone. He'd meant to go; there was a note saying so. He'd dropped off the train somewhere and disappeared. She had searched through the train calling him, and got off in a panic at the first stop. She was hungry, penniless, heavy with child. And Diana took her home to the cottage where she and Robert had just set up housekeeping and put her to bed in a tiny back room for which she hadn't had the time to make window curtains.

Sue Bush stayed in that house ten years. Angie was born there, that winter, a lovely baby with a tender skin and honey-colored hair; and there, the next fall, Chris was born, joining the household as casually as he was destined to do important things all his life. Sue washed, ironed, swept, scrubbed, mended and gardened to her heart's deep content. She developed a penchant for cooking. From under her red capable hands emerged chickens delicately crisped, roasts done to a turn. Aspics. Fluffy rolls and cakes. Pastry that flaked on the tongue. The babies grew up together in the shady yard where Sue built them a sandbox and concocted an unmanageable lock for the back gate. It wasn't until the Waynes moved into their second house that she set up as cateress to Anchorage.

She did not know it, but that successful venture of hers began with Angie's pilferings. Angie at nine was light-fingered and Diana was torn between a Puritanic horror of the theft and the pain of having to hurt Sue. Stooping over her flower-border she relived, now, the stress of that conflict. Angie's furtive hands. An-

gie's clear innocent lovely eyes. Angie's imperturbable lying. She had discussed the matter with Bob and Kent and she remembered that Kent, with his uncompromising integrities, urged the sternest measures, but Robert was no surer than she that anything could be gained by telling Sue. Why play God to Angie Bush? Her sneaking trickery might be just a phase which the child would outgrow; and if she didn't outgrow it, Sue would discover it sometime for herself. No need to use a bludgeon on her, was there? Angie would have to go away; she was a bad influence for Chris. But couldn't it be managed tactfully?

Diana managed it tactfully. Through the lips of a dozen matrons the suggestion was conveyed to Sue that an ample living lay within reach of her deft hands. Anchorage needed a cateress, badly. When Sue broached the subject, Diana said the idea was worth trying, proffered Bob and Kent as financial backers and fitted up rooms for Sue with the furniture she was discarding when she moved into a larger house. Time had proved that she had done a wise thing. Sue had done well from the first and Angie, though she might wait table in her dining-room, no longer touched Diana's life. "But I must remember to lock my dressing-table," she thought. "There must be no temptation. Oh, I hate locking things up in my own house."

And, with her hands filled with asters, she went in to breakfast.

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There was a subdued stir in the house. Ace, a copper-colored serving man in a white jacket, moved smoothly about the dining-table laying silver in a precise pattern. He brought a bowl for Diana's flowers, and arrang-

ing them, she dismissed the thought of Angie Bush. Sunlight wavered in bronze gleams on the pine-paneled walls and the polished table where Ace was placing tumblers of orange juice; ice tinkled in the glasses, a percolator on the side-table began to bubble suddenly. Diana struck the muffled chimes which hung in the doorway, and went to her chair, waiting contentedly for the four men who lived under the same roof to come to her, cherishing her expectancy of their approach. She had a tranquil feeling of security, even of ascendancy, one woman among four men, to each of whom she meant something essential.

She heard Peniel pattering, in his soft slippers, across the hall. A door banged, echoing through the house and Chris pounded on the stairs. He stopped in the doorway, a tall boy with a brown, vivid face topping his broad shoulders. She was a trifle ashamed of her pride in him and she tried conscientiously to assume the air of that imaginary woman, the mother of an ordinary son, but she deceived no one. Through the murmur of Chris's greeting she could hear Robert and Giles, loitering in the hall; and she called impatiently, "Boys . . . don't. Don't talk till I can hear you."

"The stuff's moved," said Giles as they came in. He gave her a scant brotherly smile. "We shan't miss a step. That's something, Di. Moving a newspaper plant over night and keeping the stride."

"What time did you get home?"

"Five o'clock. I heard Mr. Wayne go down stairs as I got into bed."

He did not look as if he had come in at five. His hair was sleekly brushed. He was tubbed, freshly shaven, his cheeks were suffused with healthy color. A compact, supple creature . . . Giles Ennis . . . with

the strength in his narrow body fined down to sheer energy.

"I didn't hear you," said Diana, "I heard Bob and was just awake enough to blink at my clock. Three, dear, wasn't it?"

"Oh, about that." He looked up from the paper folded at his plate. "I tried not to waken you."

Diana laughed. "I couldn't sleep very well last night. And I woke before six. The day, somehow, seemed so important."

She felt its importance emphasized even in the commonplace activity of her breakfast-table. Ace took their plates, brought cereal to Chris, placed the tray of cups before Diana and turned back to the dishes on the serving table from which rose the savory odor of broiled ham.

Giles continued to talk about the moving.

"Things were a mess. Every man moved for himself and nobody knew where. It was a nerve-racking business. We had to leave the city room looking as if a Kansas cyclone had gone through it, because, just as everything was dumped, someone discovered there weren't any keys for the new files. Amlie had one of his vile headaches and went home before one o'clock."

"Poor Kent. The spirit truly is ready but the flesh is weak. Usually, he sticks it through as long as Bob, whatever the pain. The strain has been too much for him."

Their silence admitted the fact. Robert's eyes went back to his paper and after a pause, Peniel said reflectively:

"Keys. K-keys. I saw them . . . s-s-omewhere. Now where? Late yesterday afternoon, four o'clock or maybe five. Nearer five than four because the first truck didn't leave the old place till after four and I walked

over to the new plant after that. I remember keys, distinctly. B-bright keys with little linen tags on them, and all numbered, in a box. The box was on a roll-top desk . . . and in the hall outside Bob's office."

Robert lifted his head abruptly. "Keys? I have the keys for those files in my desk."

"Stupid of me," Giles murmured, "but your desk was locked."

But Robert was there after Kent Amlie left, for nearly two hours. It wasn't a fifteen minute drive from the plant to their house. Diana saw again the hands, palely-green, of her clock-dial, pointing to three as they had been when she heard her husband's step on the stairs . . . and glancing up she caught an odd expression vanishing from her brother's face. For a second he looked like an ironical tom-cat. She had a subtle perception that Robert had been thrown off-guard by Peniel's prosy details, startled into making a statement he preferred to omit; and Giles was amused. To her own surprise she found that her breathing was uneven . . . but that was absurd. Looking down the table she saw her husband watching her gravely. He said:

"You did ask Raedel to the dinner, didn't you, finally?"

"I asked him," Diana answered in an even tone that betrayed reluctance, "Though I don't quite know why you wanted me to do it."

"Giles suggested it," he said easily, "Raedel's not a bad sort. He's coming?"

She nodded and sipped her coffee thinking that men knew a sex-masonry that held them in bond against the judgments of women. She had worked with men all her life, lived closer to them than to women, but she found them, constantly, a little incalculable. What

possible congeniality could there be between Giles and Bob and a man like Kurt Raedel? He was uncouth, an Esau, red all over like a hairy garment.

"Do you think he'll be comfortable?" she asked.

"Put him beside a pretty woman and he'll be comfortable enough," said Giles.

Diana ignored the implication. "Must she be a parlor Bolshevik?" she inquired with delicate emphasis, "Or a subscriber to the *Clarion*? Chris, honey, don't be late for school." She was wishing that all of them would go away and leave her with Robert, alone. "More coffee, Giles?"

"Thanks, I've had two." He took out a cigarette and got up as though he understood her impatience, "You needn't be afraid Raedel won't wear a dinner-coat. I saw him buying one at Cone's."

Diana laughed, but she was glad to see him turn to the door. He took Chris with him and, when Peniel slipped away, she put out her hand for her husband's cup with a feeling that they had conspired together to snatch this fragment of time out of the day.

She made no effort to talk. They sat still but there was nothing constrained nor dull in their stillness. It was, simply, that they had lived together long enough to do without words. Diana vaguely enjoyed these silences with Robert finding in them a masculine content, complimentary to herself. The act of pouring cream into his cup and scalding it expertly with hot coffee had its momentary significance because by it she related herself to this man as no other woman could. He belonged to her.

For several moments she looked at him quietly. She was trying to scrutinize him, impersonally, as a man not her husband, but what she took in was his

satisfying familiarity: his heavy, handsome shoulders, his substantial head, his hair graying at the temples, his imperturbable face with its straight nose and dusky healthy skin. He stirred the coffee absently, concentrated in some pondering of his own.

"You're tired, dear."

"A little."

"Circles under your eyes. Didn't you sleep?"

"Not right away. Well enough toward morning."

"The building, just now, has been a strain on you. I wish we could go away, somewhere for a month."

"That's out of the question this fall, Diana."

"There's nothing wrong . . ." she said quickly.

He lifted his head. "No. No . . . nothing . . ." Ace was slipping a tidbit of ham to Robert's plate with a soft grin, and after he had gone Robert said slowly: "I want to tell you why I asked you to invite Kurl Raedel tonight, Diana."

"Some special reason?"

"Yes. This isn't to be talked about to anyone, but . . . we may consider merging Raedel's *Clarion* with the *Journal*."

"That smutty little sheet? Oh, my dear. Why?"

"It seems . . . expedient." After an instant's hesitation spent searching for a better word, he repeated, "Expedient. Raedel is a good newspaper man."

"But do we need him on the *Journal*? Isn't Giles . . . ?"

"Giles is pulling for him. The town isn't big enough to carry two papers. It might be advisable to absorb our opposition."

Diana chuckled. "I didn't know we considered the *Clarion* opposition. It's been gasping along . . . how many years?"

"Ten, perhaps; but lately it's not been gasping, exactly. Raedel's becoming a factor to be reckoned with."

"Will you give him stock?"

He answered with a slight impatience: "I don't know what terms we'll make. It will be sixty days, at least, before the deal goes through. Then, it may come to nothing. It is only that there is a rather subtle pressure."

"Pressure? Bob, what do you mean?"

Robert rose from the table. For a second he stood irresolute; then he came to her chair, leaning over her with his arm on the high back.

"I can't tell you, my dear. I'm not certain myself what it's all about. By tonight I'll know more. Only straws are blowing down the wind: the fact that Senator Moulden is seriously ill; the fact that if Moulden is out of the running . . . and he's old . . . almost any man with the proper influences behind him could be elected next fall; the fact that this . . . suggestion to take in Raedel comes from certain quarters, significantly, at this particular time. D'you think you might like Washington, Mrs. Wayne?" He produced a wise smile for her, barely perceptible on his lips.

Impulsively, she turned her cheek against his hand. "Bob, dearest . . . my dear." Washington. Oh, she could allow herself to covet that. What opportunity would it mean for them? For Chris? How firmly in the beginning, they had believed that sometime, this sort of thing would happen and how unbelievable it had become as the years passed and they had grown wise with looking on at the world. It had been one of their young dreams, retreating, becoming dim and illusory, never coming true. But it had come true. Goodness and mercy following all their days. . . .

Robert said: "Don't go expecting, Diana. It's all

vague, yet. But make a chance tonight to chat with Kurt Raedel and be specially nice to him. He'll be awkward, perhaps, even a bit shy."

"Won't I, just? In my own house? You can count on me for that much."

"I do," he declared. He drew back her chair and kissed her as she stood up, his mouth fleetingly on hers. It was an habitual caress, so merely husbandly that it was unimportant, yet it quickened her. Unwilling to let him go, she followed him to the door.

"Bob. What does Kent say to this?"

"Kent? I haven't talked to Kent. I can't talk . . . yet." He said something more, a reiterated demand for secrecy, but the words were lost in the finality of the door, closing behind him.



Toward noon, Diana drove herself in the Ford sedan into Anchorage. The road, newly paved and christened—Pershing Road—was nevertheless a long-traveled county highway, bordered by tall trees which had been planted by some early, impractical visionary who liked trees. She knew its every aspect thoroughly, the rolling golf course, dotted with gay sweaters to the left, the façades of broad houses, set far apart in wide lawns that dwindled little by little to narrow yards as she neared the town. She drove expertly, her hands casual, competent on the wheel. Her thoughts, turned inward, dwelt on her husband.

She was never quite able to analyze their relationship. It was so close, so essentially simple that it defied investigation. From the beginning her marriage—and *The Anchorage Journal* which was an inseparable part of her marriage—had made life for Diana. Rob-

ert held her close by an arrogant magnetism that drew her into his ways of thought, and this had not lessened even in the devastating intimacies of married life. In the first years when they were headstrong and impatient, they had quarreled—who didn't?—but their quarrels ended in brief reconciliations, half-tenderness, half laughter. They had accepted each other's ways and faults. By now, through the luminous commonplaceness of their existence together, Robert's faults were insignificant, unavoidable components of his qualities: his easy tolerance, the charm that drew other men to him, his impenetrable surface. Diana thought of his poker-player's face and smiled. He was not impenetrable to her. He was as certain, as predictable as the tides. Love robbed their relation of any possible complexity and lay beneath their mutual desire to keep it free from friction. If their young rapture had dulled a little . . . and that was to be expected, surely, in people past the first tumult of youth . . . their affection had constantly, quietly deepened. It was a bond that kept them all, even Chris, secure.

As she turned into a bricked street, dipping to the bridge, she saw Peniel standing by a hydrant with Owen Morgan. She swerved smoothly to the curb.

"I'm going over to town, Father Wayne. Can't I take you?"

"Why, yes, Diana. Yes . . . yes. I stopped for a moment to chat with Owen, but about nothing in particular. I'll be getting on," They regarded her with a blank look, still withdrawn, she felt, in the parley she had interrupted. This disturbed her and turning to the dour little Welshman, she asked after his son.

"Jamie's better." His reply, in a husky burr, was instinctive, and then, looking at her, he added uncertainly, "I think much better, thank you, Mrs. Wayne.

He's begun to pull up these last two months. He's begun to eat, though he's seldom with an appetite; he does it against appetite, but it's making a difference. He wanted nourishing bad."

"I haven't seen him for a long time."

Jamie Morgan had shocked her, then. He seemed no more than the outer scaffolding of a man, thin-shanked and sallow and haggard. His illness, which was somewhat mysterious, was of long standing. He had been a playmate of Giles', in their boyhood, and the thought of her brother, sleek, affable, humming with energy, filled her with pity for old Owen.

"He's begun to pull up," he said, stubbornly, "He works, most days, now, helping me in the yard."

Diana sent a glance toward the house and the down-at-the-heel little lumber yard beside it. A Mansard of gray brick, it served with an unaltered façade for Morgan's residence and place of business. As long as Diana had known Anchorage, she had known this corner with Owen's name in gray letters, picked with red, arching across the bay window, and the yard, beyond, its lumber piles and coal bins straggling across a barren lot toward a spur of railroad track. Above it she could see the chimneys and stacks of factories, every funnel with a smoke-plume sweeping in the wind. The district was the ugly fringe of the town's prosperity. Streets lay beyond it, bordered by dirty trees, fragments of gray fences, and flimsy houses which, huddled close against the sidewalk, were crowded with the negroes who had begun pouring into Anchorage ten years before.

Other tradesmen had moved across the river as they prospered, but Owen Morgan clung to his holdings. It was cheaper, Diana reflected, for he owned the house and used the upper floors as living quarters;

and the yards were adequate. Peering up at the bay window, she saw a movement behind it and said abruptly:

"You've kept Candace Marshall?"

"Yes ma'am," said Morgan with dry emphasis, "I never had a better bookkeeper. She got up collections in three months better than that old maid who worked for me fifteen years. She's quick as scat. And she don't draw no line anywhere . . ."

"It's a v-very decent family?" said Peniel stepping briskly into the sedan. "A n-nice family. The Reverend Judson of the Colored Baptist is an uncle, isn't he, Diana?"

"There's a large connection. I've Ace Marshall in my house."

Owen Morgan shuffled his legs. He said: "She don't draw no line, that's what I like. Dusts the office like it was a lady's parlor and has a nigger-boy here Saturday, washing windows. When old Medinah was sick this summer and Jamie had a down-spell, Candace turned to the cooking, too. She's a smart one. Jamie begun pulling up on her broth."

A girl had come out on the high stoop, and stood swaying a little with a motion like wind-blown wheat. She had a slender, rounded body, a dark head proudly poised. The skin of her face and forearms, bare against the soft blue linen of her frock, had a golden tawnniness.

"You' wanted on the tel-phone, Mr. Morgan," she called in a voice tinged with regret "How a' you, Mis' Wayne?"

"Very well, thank you, Candace. And you?"

"Oh, jus' fine. It's a pretty day, don' you think?"

"A lovely day," She lifted her head to the winey fragrance, rising even there, and smiled at Candace.

The girl ran part way down the steps.

"Did you know I was repo'tin' social items out our end, Mis' Wayne? Yes'm, I am. Eve'y week Fridays, my write-up's in . . . Colored Baptist' and Thu'sday Evenin' Club and lodges, all like that. You look afte' it, now, Mis' Wayne; you see how I do. I'm makin' good little pin-money eve'y week off'n it. Yes'm."

She stood lightly, caught in a moment of eagerness. The thin sunlight poured over her and her eyes had a veiled, dusky brilliance. As comely as the tents of Kedar, thought Diana. "Thy teeth like a flock of sheep that is even-shorn . . . the hair of thy head like purple . . . and thy breasts like clusters of grapes . . ."

Someone in the dark curve of the stair, inside, called to her, "Candace," and she turned and went in. Starting her car, Diana had a glimpse of her in the oblique shaft of sunlight beyond the door and heard the submissive murmur of her voice. Then she moved into shadow and a door closed, somewhere sharply.

"She's a p-pretty girl, isn't she, Diana?" said Peniel, "And a n-nice girl. A nice, p-pretty girl."



The Anchorage *Journal* occupied a prosperous corner opposite the post office. A tall unadorned building of steel and brick and sparkling glass. The massive plate glass doors stood wide open at the bottom of a squat flight of steps leading up to the lobby which achieved dignity from the height of its ceiling, the spaciousness of its tiled floor. Behind the brass gratings the business of the afternoon went forward in a subdued hubbub. Rather more than an ordinary hubbub and ostentatiously subdued. The neat clerks, all so

much the same pattern, developed dramatic gestures, frowning in concentration over the whirling of a pencil-sharpener, counting change or the words of a three-line ad with a slightly histrionic gravity as if they were all actors doing clever bits in a play.

The audience moved obliviously past them. People stood about, examining the substantial walls, the brass, the lofty windows with a conscientious solemnity. They passed up and down the stairs, the light from above throwing their lifted faces into white relief. Diana Wayne knew most of their faces. For an hour she moved about, now with this group now with that, as if they were her guests; but her mind dwelt on the congratulatory baskets of flowers, massed against the dark wainscoting. She kept discovering that she was craning her head over her shoulder to read the cards tied to the high wicker handles or tucked among the blossoms. Her mind played over them fantastically. Only those massed, extravagant flowers seemed quite real to her. Nothing else—the telegrams piled on Robert's desk, the telephones squealing in her ears, the neat, important clerks—produced even the surface feeling of actuality.

Upstairs, she saw Kent Amlie coming toward her along the corridor. He walked past the door of the ticker room and Diana waited for him, turning into his office at his shoulder.

"Do I bother you, Kent? The first-page copy's gone to press by now."

"Just. Come in and talk. I'd like to sit down and do nothing for twenty minutes."

"Is the headache still as bad as all that?"

"The headache's gone." As she shook her head, doubtfully, he assured her, "Quite gone."

"You act always as if pain were a matter for chagrin."

"Isn't it?" He stood before her, his head slightly bent, his eyes luminous and somber in his dark face.

Propping her face on her hands, she studied him. Pain had left its ineffaceable stamp on Kent Amlie. Sheer physical pain. The outline of his face was clear, and his firm, angular features, the thin cheeks that came high up under his black eyes, had a curious harmony. Its surface was disciplined to betray nothing; but beneath that fine, close surface lay marks of suffering like dark stains. He drew in a breath of laughter and ironic lines deepened with the movement of his lips.

"You couldn't stay away, Diana. You had to come here."

"I didn't try to stay away. I've planned for weeks . . . months . . . oh, all of ten years, to savor this day to the full if it ever came. I purred at Bob this morning like a thick tabby-cat he'd been feeding with cream. I got down in time to look over the new Goss and make coffee for the girls' luncheon. That rest-room is a dream . . . and I've been downstairs, since, curtsying to all comers in the best manner of the Court of St. James."

"Mrs. Robert Wayne, receiving, was wrapped in the Veil of Maya, *colour de rose*."

"I'm not being spoofed, am I, Kent?"

"Spoofed? By me? Diana."

"You merely remind me that I'm an inveterate sentimentalist, looking out on things through the rose-mists of my own illusions. Well . . . I am. I know it. It's useless to pretend I'm not."

"Rose-mists become you. I don't mind your being sentimental."

"You really hate it. You accept it in me because you've the knowledge that you can't change people, but you've no sentiment yourself, not a scrap; not so much as Bob. You have too bitter an intelligence."

"Circumstance, I suppose," he said.

Diana thought: "Bodily circumstance. Pity! Why must that human deformity be the fundamental fact in his existence?" and she said aloud, "Sentimentalize this occasion a little, Kent, do. It has some significance, hasn't it? We've planned it for so long, we've worked so hard. Kent, aren't you happy?"

"Yes . . . I am. I'll not deny it. Have you read the telegrams?"

"Some of them. We certainly have hosts of friends."

"Our enemies didn't take the trouble to congratulate us."

"Or perhaps, on a day like this, 'when a man's ways please the Lord, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.' "

Kent gave a jerky laugh.

"Diana, I miss you. I miss your incessant texts. If you had been here last night to say that to me, I'd have written a leader on it."

"I wanted to come down last night," she said, "but Bob didn't want me. He made such a point of my being fresh for our dinner tonight that I went to bed with a book at half-past nine. You're coming, Kent? Your headache won't keep you away?"

"My head's all right, I tell you. I went home before one. Bob had gone and Giles remembered he'd locked some of the keys in his desk. Mine was among them so I had no reason for staying after the A.P. wire was working."

Diana sat up tensely, looking down at her clasped

hands. For an instant all her energies focused on concealing any possible surprise. A deep breath rasped in her throat. How silly she was! All this disturbance because Giles had fibbed about those keys. Giles had always fibbed as easily as he breathed. "Stupid of me," he had murmured. Was he baiting Robert? Or . . . shielding him? And why? Why? Why had they let her assume that Kent had gone home hours before Bob left the plant? She would ask them both what it meant. No . . . she wouldn't.

Bob had probably come home earlier than he expected and snatched a few rare hours for reading, knowing she was in bed. In times of stress he was always restless, given to long drives alone in the hope of tumbling into oblivion when he reached home. She wouldn't bicker with him over this. . . . But she had an unreasoning desire to see him. She wanted to go where he was, to have the obscure comfort of a glimpse of him if she could not speak with him. She looked up from her careful scrutiny of her hands, and spoke in a casual voice.

"Where is he? Bob, I mean. Where is he, now?"

"Over at the club. He has Cretcher and Boyd Despard with him."

His eyes rested significantly on hers. He answered her lightly but there was something in the implications of his tone that restored her assurance. Kent understood as well as she what this conference might hold for the future, and he wanted all the good fortune that could come to them. On her lips was a question about Kurt Raedel. Was he included in this conference with Cretcher? But in an instant, she remembered her pledge of secrecy. Odd . . . to keep anything from Kent.

She rose, slowly, pulling on her gloves. "I must go. I hate going. Have you decided yet about a Sunday edition?"

"Hasn't Bob told you? We're starting next month; there's a lot of good advertising lined up, now. Diana . . . I wish you'd revive that chit-chat stuff you used to do for the Woman's Page. We've tried Miss Barron out, but she muffs it."

"Doesn't she! It sounds as hard as if she were throwing brick-bats at the gentry. What does Bob think?"

"He hasn't said. It's all we'll ask of you, I promise. We've accepted the fact that you've left the paper."

"Not really left," she said quickly, "I've thought I'd continue to be Egeria to you, so to speak. But I do want time to seek out women; I've existed in a man's world for so long, and I like women. I want leisure for bridge and silly clubs. I want to talk about clothes and draperies and gardens, nothing else. I want to have the visiting celebrities in for tea and develop one of those elegant wrists that come from spearing lemon-slices. You don't need me, here. There's Giles working up, and soon Chris will come in. He's seventeen, Kent. Five years . . . six years, and he'll fall into step." She glowed suddenly, "He's going to love it."

"What is it, Miss Lake?" asked Kent.

One of the clerks stood in the doorway. "More flowers, Mr. Amlie." She held up a square, pale-green box. "They came just now from the florist's, but there's no card. It isn't like the other boxes." It was impossible to tell whether they had opened it downstairs. The paper was exactly creased, the gold cord knotted; but the girl's air was apologetic.

"It doesn't look like the ordinary congratulation," said Kent. "Open it, Diana."

Diana took the box and held it in her hands. She set it on the table and seated herself, pressing back the paper, smoothly; and, at last, she lifted the cover. A delicate, heady sweetness rushed out. Within was a mass of dark-purple blossoms starred with white, which, as she drew it up, proved to be a corsage of violets massed against the fragile racemes of freesias. She held them for a moment in the palms of her hands, inhaling their fragrance. Then she put them back, patting them gently into the box with her finger-tips. A faint smile softened her mouth.

"Bob's ordered them for tonight," she said, "I had violets and freesias for my wedding bouquet. D'you remember . . . of course, you don't. Freesias were uncommon, then. I'll thank you to notice that I'm not the only sentimentalist in the Wayne family, Mr. Amlie."

"Why are you wrapping them up again, Diana? Must you be so careful with the creases? Why not be practical and take them home with you, now?"

"Not I. I prefer to be gloriously surprised. I'll just be practical enough to leave them on Bob's desk where he can't forget them."

Returning home over the familiar road, she was quieter, her thoughts filled with small things. The cool air fanned her face, the sedate avenue had a serene beauty, a blackbird with scarlet markings flashed across a wall and vanished with the flutter of spread wings. Restful. . . . And at home, the sight of her own room, ordered and still, increased her feeling of relaxation. She slipped into a negligee, slid back the daytime coverings from her bed, drew the shades at the windows. Flinging herself prone, under an eider-down, she turned her face to the pillow; and fell asleep.

II

DIANA sent a satisfied glance down the long table. In the hall, the doors stood open to the soft night, but this room was enclosed and glowing, the amber-colored curtains drawn across the windows. Above the loveliness of zinnias, above the sparkle of silver and amber crystal, candle-flames poised in the motionless air like pointed opals.

Her dinner-party, Diana realized, was characteristic of Anchorage. Already its formality was mitigated by a small-town intimacy. Ace, who had been on duty at the door, retired to the pantry and the service in the dining-room was performed with a faultless precision by white waitresses, satellities of Sue Bush. They were ubiquitous in every house, where there was hospitality in the town. They knew the qualities of all the women who employed them: the stupid, the stingy, the excitable and feather-brained, the snobbish. They knew most of the guests too well. They knew what women were reducing and whom they could persuade, furtively, to gluttony. They knew the ascetic, the careless eaters who soiled tablecloths. No reticences deceived them. Their serving was a psychological affair, a pandering to secret appetites.

In their wake came Angie Bush, half-drifting, half-dancing about the table. A slim body and a skin that had a milky translucence. Diana, recognizing the childish hand, placing her soup-plate before her, turned with a murmur of greeting. It broke in on a rounded compliment from her guest of honor, Ralph Cretcher;

but Diana was oblivious of the interruption. She was even a trifle oblivious of Cretcher, though he was a man to be marked in any crowd of men. She had discovered that his handsome face was cruel and his eyes lively; and that though he had a pretty wit, he was too prodigal of it. She could not avoid a fleeting contempt for his blandishments which gave an effect of being dog-eared from use.

Her eyes slid away to the other faces. At the end of the table were Bob's thick shoulders and massive, comely head. On his right sat Mrs. Cretcher, a slight creature, grayly spirituelle and on his left was Virginia Sneed, whose impudences pleased him. She was dressed in a black gown cut away in points from the tender rosiness of her shoulders and she sat with parted lips leaning close to Bob who regarded her with placid delight. Beyond her, Giles was talking to the girl who had been next to him at most dinner-tables for a year. Evelyn Painter was decorative, fair and exteriorly sophisticated but when Giles smiled, she dropped her eyelids with a defenseless coquetry that Diana found a trifle pathetic. She was begging favor so frankly; and Giles withheld it. He sat there, looking remote and slightly malicious, smiling his scant, charming smile. Looking at him coldly, Diana thought that he was, really, unbearably callous and should get into the hands of some cool-hearted egotist who would know how to deal with him.

Cretcher's voice startled her.

"Who is the chap you're studying? I met him at luncheon. Name's . . . Ennis?"

"Do you remember everyone's name? He's Giles Ennis, my brother. I look on him, in a way, as my own handiwork; and I find myself studying him, occasionally, on that account."

"He was in the war, he said. He must have been very young."

"Yes. He finished college after it and came to the *Journal*. He's an uncommonly good reporter."

But when she said, '*Journal*,' her eyes swept to Chris. He took some salted almonds and smiled at her through his thick lashes, a pleased sheepish smile because he was wearing his first Tuxedo and felt stiff and brittle inside it. He had smiled like that when he was ten and Diana struggled to put him into blue serge and an Eton collar for dancing school. He had grown amazingly. For an instant, she was stirred by his strength, his fresh young dignity. Then she saw him genially exchanging his empty nut dish for Mrs. Wheeling's, who was, happily, among those reducing. His brown fingers picked greedily at the almonds, and he sent a sly grin about the table to see who had caught him exchanging.

Kent Amlie looked from Chris to Diana. They shared a glance of amusement and she touched the violets pinned against her frock with triumphant fingertips. When she had Kent alone she meant to tell him how, finally, she had got them. . . .

Bob came into his room while she was dressing for dinner. He did not switch on the light but she heard him moving about and the sound of running water came from the bath beyond her dressing-room. It was only when that ceased and no line of light showed under his door, that she knocked.

He was sitting in an armchair, his arms folded across his thick body, sunk, apparently, in some deep preoccupation.

"You've not much time, my dear," said Diana, "Less

than an hour." She shut the door softly and went close to him, "What is the matter, Bob? Why haven't you a light?"

"There's nothing the matter. I'm just tired," he said defensively. His voice was indifferent with the indifference of weariness and in the half-light his face was gray and forbidding. He looked spent.

Diana went out and brought back a decanter and a glass. He took them from her with a smile and said: "Good girl . . . thanks."

She sat down on the edge of the bed and watched him.

"You're so late. Where've you been?"

"I stayed at the office."

"Too long. Was there so much to do? You'd better have come home and rested. I wish there were something I could do to help you."

But she knew there was nothing. His dinner-shirt lay on the bed beside her, the box that held his cuff-links and studs beyond it. Still, she stayed, liking the familiar sense of being there, intimately alone with him. Robert poured out another drink and the fatigue drained out of his face as he sipped the liquor. Presently he stood up and saying, "I've had an extraordinary day," began to tell her about Cretcher and the veiled way in which Cretcher had offered him a senatorship. He told her plans already drafted, for spending money like water on a winter's campaign . . . other people's money, he made clear. Diana listened intently, halting him, now and then, to ask a question. Where did campaign contributions come from? And why, if a man were acceptable to his party, should a campaign be so costly?

But Robert fell more and more into vague pauses. He put on his shirt, changed his money to the trousers

he was wearing, in silence. Diana broke it with a casual chuckle.

"Bob, you forgot my corsage."

Her voice diverted him from his abstraction and he looked up blankly.

"Corsage?"

"Flowers, darling. They're called corsages. A proper-minded woman would be very sensitive about reminding you, but I know you ordered them. The box came to your office while I was there. If you forgot them, it doesn't matter, of course."

In the mirror she saw the compunction sweeping over his dumfounded face.

"But it does matter. They were especially for tonight." He turned swiftly, slipping into his dinner jacket as he crossed the room. "I'm sorry," he said hurriedly, "Really I am, Girl. I've been so rushed all day. I'll go down for them, now."

"You can't; you'll be late for dinner. It's all right. Tomorrow will do."

"No, it won't. They're there and I want you to wear them. If I'm late, what's the difference? And I shan't be. I'll make it." There was a boyish eagerness in his voice: "I didn't put up the car," he called back as he ran down the stairs.

She felt the vainglory of a woman beloved. He had forgotten his fatigue; wanting to please her, to play her lover. His returning car raced up the drive while the first of their guests were upstairs and he had time to pin the corsage against the crystal shimmer of his wife's frock. The kiss he dropped on her shoulder while he was doing it was a lover's kiss. But already, the violets had faded a little. Their dark freshness was gone. The warm air, the heat of her body was

changing them. They looked, by candlelight, not purple at all, more blue than purple. . . .

The dinner was going well. Talk tossed up and down the table like a ball kept in the air; no one could hold it for long. Coffee was brought and a blue haze of smoke began to twist between the candles. There would be, she estimated, four tables of bridge and the others, the men who did not play, were exactly those whom Robert liked to herd into the study for talking. Meanwhile, as long as things were like this, let them dawdle. . . .

Kurt Raedel was, by odds, the most striking person in the room. His red hair, waving above a narrow forehead, set off by its crude color, the gaunt harshness of his features. His mouth was stubborn, scored with deep furrows at the corners. His restless eyes looked out on the world with a green stare; and the looker-in, meeting that denuding regard, was both shocked and attracted. For he had a strong attraction. More, even than Cretcher, he levied interest from her other guests. As he came down the room to greet her, she had been conscious of a stir, and here, at the table, he dominated everything. Though he had lived ten years in Anchorage, this was the first time Diana could remember that she had sat at a dinner with him; and she would have remembered.

She saw that he was looking at her. His gaze met hers with a veiled expression as though behind it, he were thinking distant, speculative thoughts. Diana smiled at him and as he leaned forward, an answering smile dim but pervasive, gathered on his face, lending its gauntness a satiric humor; but his eyes held hers steadily. For a long moment they looked at each other,

seeing something unexpected, hardly recognized until it was gone, a mist obscuring the clarity of seeing.

Raedel's stare left her uneasy and she sat in a detachment that took no account of Ralph Cretcher, thinking about him. That odd, impressive figure, the editor of a shoddy newspaper. Why had he gone no further in an easy town like Anchorage? But perhaps he had had to travel a longer way from the beginning than anyone knew. She had a sudden perception of the man, lifting himself out of murky depths, filing off, with inexhaustible patience, the drag-chains that held him. Something of the sort lay behind his history; he bore the marks of harsh things lived through and she felt for him the quick sympathy that was her recurrent emotion. His attraction, she thought, studying him out of the sides of her eyes, was infinitely the more powerful in that it had an intellectual as much as an animal urgency . . . but the animal was there. A woman who loved him very much would be at his mercy. . . . She caught Mrs. Cretcher's blank gaze and pushed back her chair with a nod, a faint smile and a heart with a slight, unsteady pound.

An hour later Diana came out on the narrow flagstone terrace above the sloping lawn. In the lighted living-room behind her the four tables of bridge were filled, engrossed. Through the French doors she heard the murmur of men's voices in the study; nobody needed her. She had come to that breathing space where a clever hostess knows herself cleanly forgotten. She moved carefully past the windows to a semi-circular porch at the front of the house. The night was moonless and the dark trees showed like monstrosities against a wide star-powdered sky. The garden was a black pool, rimmed by the dark mist of shrubs and beyond lay a wide earth stripped of gross reality,

lying enchanted in ineffable peace. Diana looked and looked, caught out of herself. This was her land, a fine, simple land, purged of dross; and it reached to her heart and became one of the things she was destined to remember all her life.

At last, slowly, she was aware that someone was standing in the oblong of light, cast through the door at the far end of the terrace. Then, as the man came toward her, seeking the shadow and skirting the light, she recognized Raedel.

"Did you grow tired of talking?" she asked.

"I missed you," he answered, "I thought a look out here might be worth something. I was sure I'd find you."

His voice had a dry satisfaction and Diana asked herself amusedly if the man supposed she had come out deliberately to wait for him. She said lightly: "I can't stay indoors on a soft night. Some madness draws me out."

"Madness?" he asked contemplatively.

"Like the madness that takes you willy-nilly after fairy-piping. When I was seven, I believed in fairy-piping. I could hear the music, after dark, in the yard."

"When I was seven," Raedel said, "I was a mule-boy in a coal mine . . . night shift."

She made a hurt noise in her throat for she was picturing Chris, who had been a sturdy, turbulent young thing at seven, in a coal mine, and the vision was unbearable. She turned to look at the man standing close to her. He was her own age; their years, lived so differently, had been contemporaneous. She had the swift wish to know what his had been like.

"Come, talk with me a while," she said, "No one will miss us. You aren't cold?"

"No." He turned and sat down beside her on a bench set in the angle of the stone chimney. "What about you?"

She was wearing an Andalusian shawl, a garnet shadow in the dusk, and she drew it about her.

"I'm never cold. I'm not a cold-blooded woman; and I do want to talk to you. I talked about you with my husband, this morning."

"About the merger?"

"You don't need to tell me about it, if you'd rather not."

"It's on the books. We considered its possibility, today. What we'll be doing in two months' time, God knows."

She said with quiet emphasis, "Robert told me nothing about your talk."

"He will. He'll tell you and Amlie, both. Are you going to oppose it?"

"I'm not given to meddling; at least, not much."

"I lived with one meddling woman," Raedel answered with so bitter an accent that Diana was shocked. "I divorced her."

She had not known he had been married. But she had known nothing about him and she saw that he was, deliberately, paving the way to an understanding that might go on a long time, perhaps always. How strange to sit there talking with him like this, she thought and was startled when he spoke, abruptly.

"Is Kent Amlie a friend of yours?"

"Quite the dearest friend we have."

"But particularly yours? Your meddling there might be useful. He's none of mine."

"How do you know?"

He moved his head stiffly to look at her. "D'you think I've run a paper in a town ten years and not

known how I stand with men? I fight for my place. And he doesn't approve of it."

"Kent approves good fighting. He's unalterably decent."

"A prig, rather, isn't he?"

Diana stopped to think, trying to define Kent in the simplest terms. "He is a man with a handicap. I think you'll find that his code is based on his . . . his handicap."

Raedel laughed. "In the little I've dealt with him, I've not noticed there was much difference between his code and mine. We're pirates, all of us. Codes when you use them reduce themselves to a few fighting rules. Get on, take what you want, fight like the devil. It's what you have to do; and what does it matter how you do it, so long as good comes of it?"

"There are some fundamental decencies," Diana said evenly.

"Exactly . . . and the rest is ritual. One learns not to recognize the ritual. I don't claim a fixed code; but I've never been sorry, yet, for anything I've done. . . . Amlie can hardly prevent my coming to the *Journal* if the Waynes are for me, eh?"

Diana sent him a curious glance.

"Tell me something. Do you really want this? I can see how this merger is to our advantage but I wonder about you. You've had your own paper. It must mean . . . must have meant something to you as an entity in itself. . . ." The *Anchorage Journal* was such an entity to her. She had a clear deep passion for it. To lose it, to have it destroyed, would be a pain almost as intolerable as the pain of losing Bob or Chris; but she could not put that feeling into words, for a stranger. She said, instead: "You really want to come in with us? It isn't just expedient?"

"I want to come," he said flatly, "Yes, it's expedient, of course. The merger is to my advantage as much as yours. But it isn't wholly a matter of expediency. I want to come with you for . . . several reasons. Aren't you able to think of one or two?"

"Why not just tell me?"

His laugh startled her. "You don't give yourself away, do you?" he asked. Then, with an unexpected change of manner to something quiet and appealingly serious, he went on: "This spells opportunity for me, Mrs. Wayne. I've fought, for ten years, now, for those fundamental decencies you mentioned, and I've found it a lonely business. I've thought sometimes that the hand of every man in Anchorage was against me; but with you, with all of us pulling together, we can fight anything through." He hesitated, and again his tone changed, "I could tell you a lot of things about this town that you don't know. Hell . . . you couldn't know. A man whose life has been like mine, looking on, sees a good deal. Sometimes it's a sidelight on the lives of people like those you had at your dinner-party, the things they think they get away with because they've wealth enough to use some of it for hush-money; sometimes, it's the pious gentry, or just a cocaine runner slinking along River street. Sidelights. There's filth here, under the smooth surface. There's a case, now . . . a nigger wench . . . Filth . . . and I'm not going to tell you anything about it. I can't tell you. There are things a man can't discuss with a decent woman."

But there was a curious listening quality in his pause. As if he were waiting for some question, some faint word of hers which would carry them on into an intimate frankness. Why did he suggest things that could not be discussed and drop into silence leaving

the taint of their evil on the air? There was nothing that she was not able to talk over with Bob and Kent; discussions which had touched most facts and accepted them. . . . But Raedel made a subject, somehow, personal.

"It's a rotten world," he said in that provocative low voice.

"Even if that is the truth, I'll not dip my flag to it," Diana answered carefully "and I doubt that it's the truth. I haven't found it a rotten world."

"Because you've been sheltered. You delicate, overbred women never touch reality."

"Come, not so preposterously sheltered. I've worked on a newspaper and that touches reality, even in a country town."

"You've not lived as I've lived," he said grimly.

She caught a glimpse of the truth and saw how he had been ground between the millstones. All that his face suggested was probably true; poverty and the worst hardships together with an authentic cleverness and strength gave his manner its rough edge, his voice that dry assurance.

"I could talk to you," he said, "I could sit here and tell you all that's happened to me, all my life. You think I'm a radical, a Socialist. I'm not."

"I don't think it."

"It's true I'm at odds with certain people, women like those in there," he jerked his head toward the lighted windows, "and the men, too, even your husband, though he's easy among men. I hate class distinction and pretense. I'm at odds . . . but not with you. You're the only woman here tonight, I'd talk to. Are you going to be . . . friends with me?"

"I hope to be."

"Friends . . ." he repeated contemplatively; and

began, as if the word made the fact, to talk to her about himself. He poured out a hodge-podge of a story, touched with suggestive and outrageous detail. Diana had again a sense of murky chaos and this gaunt, swaggering figure storming up through its shadows.

She listened to all he had to say in silence, her hands folded together on her crossed knees. The restless, striving creature he revealed woke a responsive thrill in her. He knew so positively what he wanted and had slaved, unsparingly, to have it. There was a Diana who was like that, who belonged to that ruthless order of the desirous, a Diana who wanted power and knew how ambition drove its slaves. And there was another Diana, a woman acutely aware of the man's dynamic attraction. His charm caught her; she felt the impact of the energy pouring from his gaunt body, as if he were touching her. She knew that the epic of savage struggle which he unfolded was a second venture into familiarity with her, part of a formula that had rarely failed him. He had the arrogance of a man to whom many women have been amiable and who held them in contempt on that account. But it was a third Diana, standing aloof, rational and ironic, who saw that.

He came to a long pause and after it said softly:

"You let me talk of myself and all the time I want to talk of you. You're like no woman I've ever known. I've looked at you all these years . . . on the streets . . . in shops . . . driving your car . . . and a hundred times I've thought that you were . . . lovely. Not that it matters to you what I've thought. Or does it . . . a little? You're intolerably disturbing, tonight. What did you mean when you smiled at me with your eyes, Diana?"

Her mind leaped to the challenge, warned by the

sound of her name. She turned sharply to look at him. It was too dark to see his face clearly, but his hand slipped over hers and as she sprang to her feet, he thrust his free arm before her with a swift, brutal movement, hedging her into the angle of the chimney. Her shoulders pressed against the warm stone, she stood speechless, overcome with confusion like a young girl. Except that a girl, she reflected somewhere in her mind, would be on the look-out for philandering, while she, because she was dispensing hospitality in her own house, was off guard. Her situation was absurd and inexpressibly shocking. A muffled breath of laughter escaped her, suddenly.

As suddenly she found herself in his arms with his lips against hers and all her sensations crushed down into helpless anger. At last he lifted his head and said softly: "You're a sweet thing, my lady."

She stood in frozen contemptuous silence, waiting for him to take away the arm that imprisoned her. She would not struggle with him. He had created situations like this before; his tone, his words were those of a rough and tried technique. He had taken women like this, often, finding that brutality was a successful method.

"I didn't mean to do that," he said, mechanically, against her stillness. "I did it without thinking. You're . . . irresistible, Diana. You must know it. Are you angry?"

She did not answer and he continued to look down at her with half-closed eyes.

"Why don't you speak?" he asked in a light compressed voice, "After all what's happened? A kiss. I've kissed women before now and men have kissed you. We know what men and women are. Don't think I'm a fool . . . but perhaps I am, since I never

wanted anything in my life as I wanted to kiss you, just now. You're the . . . 'friend' I've waited for."

She was silent.

"What else does 'friend,' mean as we said it a while ago? And, 'I'm not a cold-blooded woman,' you said; but I guessed that when you smiled at me at dinner . . . smile at me now, Diana. Have I guessed too much? I'm sorry."

But there was no sorrow in his voice, only irony. Her thoughts were clear on her face: the man was a boor. His gaze became narrower and more intent, insolently considering her.

"Sulking?" he asked, "I've said I'm sorry. I'll take the blame, if you like, though it's not mine, all of it. You women dress for this sort of thing. When you use all the tricks you have to tempt a man, why are you angry when one succumbs? You came out here alone . . . you must know how you look, with your white throat and your slim, bare arms. 'I'm not cold-blooded,' you said. . . ."

"Oh . . ."

It was, unmistakably, a breath of disgust. No one could have read it differently. The insolence on his face turned slowly to anger. He was viciously angry and he spat out a dozen words with such venom that she shrank back, swallowing down frightened tears. Her knees were numb and her hands like wet marble. Then a cold rage took possession of her steadying her, spreading through her veins. It nipped her like a stimulant, sending the blood to her face and a cruel taunt to her tongue. She kept her voice clear while she spoke it.

Raedel took the insult without visible tremor. He stood rigid, with a face drawn and harsh, staring down at her with expressionless intensity. Then he dropped

his arm and they walked in complete silence to the door.

"You aren't coming in," Diana said tonelessly.

He looked at her with his green stare. "Of course I am," he answered in an amazed voice, "God . . . why not?"

He opened the door and stepped before her into the vestibule, but she did not follow. At the threshold of the second door he swung, expectantly, on his heel.

"Aren't you? Aren't you coming in?"

"In a moment," she answered faintly and stayed where she was. For the lights of a moving motor on the road had fallen against a tangle of syringa and dogwood, illuminating two figures under the maples. A girl slipped quickly away into the darkness as the glare shifted. The other was Chris . . . there was no mistaking that long figure. Diana stood still, her hand caught on the handle of the door. What girl . . . Angie Bush? Chris and Angie, meeting slyly in the shrubbery? The thought was enough to drive Raedel and all that had passed, from her mind. She saw Raedel at the end of the hall, looking back at her, but the sight had no meaning. She watched him go into the study with a dreamy inattentiveness and a moment later found that Chris had disappeared and the lawn was empty. Slipping through the hall, she went unnoticed up the stair.

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Diana lived through the next half-hour in a perturbation, confused, inexplicable and beyond solace. The excitement that had flooded through her flowed away; she was tired and tortured by self-scorn. For a long time she walked the floor restlessly, angered anew

each time the recollection of Raedel's kisses roused her.

What had happened seemed senseless. The incident itself was preposterous and her thoughts veered to speculation about its cause. The man had confounded her with the violence and swiftness of his maneuver; nothing had been farther from her intention than what had occurred. Raedel's point of view, his assumption that no man and woman would find themselves alone in a dusky corner and resist intimacy, made his offense a commonplace event in his experience; and something in the moment, her interest in him, her sense of his crude charm, had betrayed her to him.

In itself a kiss could hardly be held important. Married women had been kissed before in the history of the world with comparatively few revolutions resulting; and though Diana had not been, she accepted the tone of a period which proclaimed caresses trivial. She had been wise, she told herself, to make no scene. To have struggled or called out, even to have forbidden Raedel entrance to her house, would have been to make herself ridiculous in the most dramatic fashion. No danger had threatened her. It was her recognition of rude assault, of an imagination, wilfully prurient, which sickened her with dismay.

Her heart misgave her when she thought of Kurt Raedel. If the proposed merger of the papers went through . . . and that seemed a certainty . . . she necessarily would see him, perhaps be forced to have him, often, in her house. The only alternative was to make a stand against him, now, at once; to throw his casual kiss, so to speak, into the balance with the merger and insist that it had greater weight. But it didn't; it had no significance at all in his sight. She could not make an issue of it; already, with her anger

still upon her, she knew that it was better to ignore the incident as something wholly fortuitous.

Yet it was there. Pretending that it had not happened merely opened the way to further presumptions. Diana created for herself no illusions about the man with whom she was dealing. Raedel wasn't the sort to consider any woman invulnerable nor to forgive a slight. Too many had found him attractive and consequently had stripped him of belief in their chastity and fastidiousness. He had proved himself a boor, but he had been able to pull Diana down to his level. Something in her was degraded and ashamed. He had talked to her, twisting the things she had said, and at last she had returned an answer in the same vulgar tongue. . . . No, if pride were hidden anywhere in that devious, gutter-rat character, he would hardly forgive the epithet she applied to him; and she was profoundly shocked by the thought of a dignity lost. . . .

Her nerves were quivering and she stood still, for a moment, her hands locked over her throat. Had she been gravely culpable? Or just blind and a fool? Either was bad enough. She had come out of an ignominious five minutes with ignominy lying like ashes on her head. There was no more than that to be said about it.

The admission brought her a temporary calm, though it was mere bravado, and she found herself beginning to think more clearly. She stood still, making stroking motions with her palm along the solid polished foot rail of her bed. Then, remembering something, she turned and went down the hall to her son's room.

Chris was asleep. He slept with his long supple body sprawled loosely across the bed and his head on

one outflung arm. The windows were opened and the quiet night was like a presence in the room. Diana sat down carefully at the edge of the bed, looking at him, at his tumbled hair, his thick dark lashes, his strong throat. He rolled over and she tucked the blanket about his shoulders, thinking: "You dear. You still look like a little boy, sprawled out, asleep. . . ."

Chris woke up and lay blinking drowsily while he yawned. Then he reached up and pulled her down, his arm squeezing her neck hard. "Don't throttle me," she whispered and kissed him.

"Party over?" he asked lazily, "What time is it?"

"Nearly eleven. They're still playing. Were you outside just now?"

He yawned again. "Nipped around the drive, two-three times. Got to limber up if I make the football team."

"I thought I saw you," she hesitated for a breath, "with a girl . . ."

"Yep. Angie Bush. She wasn' helpin' with the dishes, just waitin'. She stopped to ask me when the first game was."

"When is it?"

"Two weeks, Saturday. You comin'?"

"Did you think I'd miss it?"

They both laughed. Diana never missed anything which engaged Chris, if she could help it. Between them there were peculiar subtle sympathies. She had been so young when he was born that she had always a queer feeling they had grown up together. He saved things to tell her, jokes, his gay adventures, but often it took days for them to come to the surface. If she hounded him, too soon, their conversation became a corkscrew affair of question and answer, and was

spoiled. A week after an event, after he had nurtured it in his mind, his confidences blossomed.

A sharp delight in him swept over her. "I must slip along," she said, regretfully, "People will be going soon."

Chris patted her shoulder in a random caress and flung his arm above his head. Brushed with drowsiness, he was slipping away from her. He said, dropping deeper into sleep: "I think I got tackle cinched. . . . I'm not sure . . . pretty sure . . ."

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The living-room was long and spacious, filling the whole of a large wing with windows on three sides. Soft-colored rugs gleamed on the waxed floor, a few paintings glowed against the creamy pallor of wide walls, and there was a diffused radiance . . . harmonious fabrics, bowls of flowers, shaded lamps spreading a jewel-like pattern. The room brimmed with a rich, quiet beauty. . . .

Diana Wayne stood beside her husband, bidding good-night to a straggling file of guests. Her radiance had come back in eyes that shone darkly and cheeks delicately flushed. She smiled, she said over and over, "Good-night. I'm so glad you came . . . Good-night," and the warmth of her voice lent the words a dozen shadings. People lingered, eddying before her: The Wheelings and the Sneeds; Ralph Cretcher and his wife with her exhausted, spirituelle face and her blank eyes; Boyd Despard, who had come from Chicago for the opening and whom Giles was taking to a late train; Kurt Raedel. He took Diana's hand and held it with a deepening pressure for the duration of his

farewells. Her anger against him flamed . . . and then he was gone, with Giles and Despard. A whirl of laughter rose on the steps outside. Motors rushed down the broad drive, taking people away. . . .

Ace, moving about with his even lazy stride, was effacing the traces of the party: he folded up the card tables, collected the scattered ash-receivers and tall fragile glasses on a tray, pushed the chairs into their accustomed places. The room took on its look of immaculate order; and Diana went down to the study where she found Bob and Kent relaxed in a companionable intimacy.

These hours when the three lingered to talk over things, were an aftermath to all that happened in Anchorage. Nothing, from a state-primary to a dinner-dance, seemed quite finished without it. The men rose punctiliously as Diana crossed the threshold, but at once they sat again, returning to quiet their legs, thrust out before them. The smoke of their cigars hung on the air like ghostly festoons.

Drawing her chair between them, Diana broke their silence.

"I want to know everything you know about Kurt Raedel. What sort of man is he, Bob?"

He blew out a thread of smoke and she was aware that she had touched the core of his preoccupation.

"He's a brilliant sort. Clever and sharp. Why?"

"I had a talk with him, tonight."

"I noticed he slipped out of the room for a bit. He wasn't a bore, was he?"

"Rather. Yes. Though that's not quite the word . . ."

"I can imagine small-talk would be beyond him. He's an odd fish. Before he came to Anchorage, he was a union agitator; and smart enough at it to make

money. He began life somewhere around Pittsburgh, in the mines . . . or was it in the old country that he began? I don't know. I do know he's pulled himself up by his own boot-straps: night school, correspondence school, anything. When he blew in here to start that vagabond paper of his, I thought he might last a year; and he's lasted ten, and is making it a fairly successful sheet. He works like a dog."

Kent said: "He has a maggotty mind."

Diana's hands lay in her lap. With a queer intentness as if they belonged to someone else, she saw the fingers twitch and turn inward. She gave no other sign of restlessness and Robert protested, easily:

"It's hardly fair to judge him by your standards, Kent. Take him as he is. A rough diamond doesn't sparkle."

"When he talks about women, you think that he got his tongue in the gutter."

"Where he got his women, likely. . . ." In the shadow, Robert's head, the rugged profile, the dropping eyes had the hewn look of sculpture. He was interrupted by Giles, who opened the French doors with a sharp push, and stood looking at them, his coat hunched on his shoulders, his hat under his arm.

"I take it I can come in," he said, and came, "What's on the carpet, tonight? Or mayn't a retainer question the triumvirate?"

"We're talking about Kurt Raedel," Wayne answered. He lifted his eyes and they exchanged a look. "Perhaps it is fortunate you came. You know more about him than the rest of us."

"I've just left him." Giles sat on the arm of Diana's chair, lighting a cigarette. "He made an impression on Despard, and quite deliberately. Can't you see how he would? Simply pulled him in with raw magnetism."

Yes, Kurt Raedel would do that, deliberately. He knew, at each step, what he was doing. Diana had seen him as a devourer, dangerous to men and women alike. She sat very still, saying nothing.

"He has an extraordinary power," Giles went on in his bland, suggestive way. "He knows that to get things in this world you have to fight for them, and keep on fighting no matter how long it takes; he fights, tooth and nail. He's a good newspaper man . . . too big for the *Clarion*."

"Far and away too big," Kent agreed quietly. "I've wondered why he didn't sell it and go to some Chicago paper. There is no question of his ability."

Robert said slowly: "What might happen if we took Raedel in with us? That is ahead for us to consider."

"He's . . . dangerous."

"Less dangerous with us than against us. The *Clarion* can be bought, reasonably, and it's a buy." He stopped, thought for a minute and said quietly, "I've had a curious day. I want to tell you, Kent. There has been a definite suggestion given me that it would be wise for us to consolidate with the *Clarion*. Raedel is hand in glove with Cretcher and Wheeling. It surprised me, but it's true. He has power. I don't just know what it is; but I imagine it is the Socialist-Labor party he espoused before the war. He's always been spokesman for a floating radical element. Whatever it is, Raedel has enough behind him so that Cretcher wants him affiliated with the party organization. Cretcher intimated they'd get behind me for the senatorial campaign, if I'd take it. Moulden is out of the running and they offered it to me, for all practical purposes, on a silver platter. You know I've wanted a chance like this, and the time's opportune. The Jour-

nal's making money; you and Giles are here behind me; Boyd Despard has pledged me his support. With Cretcher to manage the campaign, election's a certainty."

"But the nigger in the woodpile is Raedel."

"It's been suggested that we need him. There's pressure being brought to bear on me to consolidate with the *Clarion*. There's nothing definite; nothing's been said openly. Only I've come to see how valuable his influence may be. And I know if we made him a reasonable offer . . ."

"Do you want him on the *Journal*, Bob?"

"Yes. I do."

There was a brief pause. In different ways, for different reasons, three people watched Kent Amlie while he turned the idea over.

"There would be difficulties," he said. "For one thing Raedel would have to revise his idea of an organ owned for propaganda purposes; personal journalism went out with good liquor in a mint julep. His paper belongs to a party. . . . It was blatantly radical before the war, though I never felt that Raedel was an entirely honest radical and it's been God-knows-what, since . . . we'd have to discover what. For another we've never tolerated lampoons. Raedel would have to ink his typewriter ribbon with something besides vitriol while he was with the *Journal*. And would he? He's as erratic as the devil."

"He's not too erratic to make money," observed Giles.

"It's power he wants, more than money. He's likely to make a fortune, or lose one, because he's mad enough to risk all he has when other men would be cautious."

"I don't like him," Diana said suddenly.

Giles turned his enigmatic smile on her.

"Do the faults you find in him have anything to do with his value to a newspaper?"

She shook her head, indulging in an ironic memory. No . . . the fault she found in him had nothing to do with any newspaper. But she did not want him to come to the *Journal*, and there grew in her the overmastering wish to tell Robert what had happened, in unsparing detail. She had a secret conviction that by doing it she would anticipate, perhaps avert, disaster. When the others were gone, when they were alone upstairs, she would tell him.

"The consolidation is feasible," Kent said, "Raedel could be very valuable to us. I'm like Diana; the faults I find in him have nothing to do with his ability."

She had counted more than she realized on Kent's opposition. The merger hung for Robert, possibly, on the single thread of Kent Amlie's prejudice. And, as swiftly as this, he had decided in its favor without reference to prejudice. But that was like him. For all his vigorous sensitive feelings of like or dislike, Kent had a mind cleared by the discipline of his pragmatist masters. He was ready to give the merger an unbiased consideration; he saw nothing untoward to prevent it. Diana found herself suddenly very tired of thinking about Kurt Raedel . . .

"He's after your own pattern, Kent," said Giles, "a hot-blooded critic of the community. He's involved now in the housing problem that's ahead of us with the darkies spreading over the south end . . ."

Diana interrupted: "Which reminds me that I saw little Candace Marshall at Owen Morgan's this morning. Giles—honey, forgive me, but I want to tell you.

She ran out to say she was 'repo'tin' ' for the *Journal*, all the south end news."

Giles smoothed his sleek hair with his hand and chanted: "'Get names for the paper, the more names, the better.' Did Owen Morgan mention Jamie? Was he around anywhere?"

"He's working in the yard, and much better. Oh, a foolish son is a calamity to his father. Owen Morgan's been getting old fast since Jamie came back from the army. But I think he's coming through. Could we take him back in the composing-room, Bob?"

"Not with the men there," Giles said quickly, "Don't go looking soft at Jamie Morgan, Di. He ran amok once. Old Owen's managed to conceal the facts but everyone knows his war record was disgraceful. He's better off selling coal for his father than anywhere."

Kent got up to go. "It's past midnight. I want sleep. Lovely party, Mrs. Wayne."

"Lovely guests, Mr. Amlie."

They smiled at each other while he picked up his hat in the hall. Kent's friendship for Robert, Diana thought, was one of knit souls like that of David for the king's son, Jonathan. A richer intimacy than most men achieve.

Giles went up at once and Robert locked the windows. Apparently the past hour had rested him, for he looked younger as though a cool hand had stroked the taut muscles about his eyes. He leaned over and kissed Diana lightly on the mouth, not looking at her, looking at her mouth. A clock struck one.

"I'm not coming up for a bit," he said, "I'm not sleepy. Too much coffee, I guess."

"Ace brought you more in the study? The dinner

went well, I think. Don't you? I believe everyone had a good time."

"I know they did."

"Don't sit up long, Bob. You've been going so hard. Are you going to read?"

"No, I don't think so. I'm too restless for reading. I'll get the car and drive."

But she had wanted to talk with him. She wanted to tell him about Kurt Raedel.

"Don't you want me to go with you?"

"No, my dear; of course not. Why should I drag you along because I can't sleep myself? I shan't be long. No . . . really, Diana. I don't want to talk; I've been talking all day. I want to think. There's no sense in your going with me."

Mounting the sweep of the stair, Diana smiled down at him while he waited at the newel post, looking after her. She seemed to be turning about him, on a spiral; and it was like that, she thought, in reality. He stood, the center of her life, and she moved about him.

III

IT was always difficult for Diana to remember clearly what had happened before she came to Anchorage. The years were confused by their commonplaceness; the days ran, tranquilly filled with little-girl tasks, conscientiously done.

There had been a white cottage with a mat of flower-bed and a big yard at the back. Against a hedge of rusty arbor-vitæ, Canterbury bells, delphinium, phlox and marguerites grew in the flower-bed and there were gnarled apple-trees at the bottom of the lawn. It must have been a small place, but out of it Diana carried a memory of enchanting windy spaces out of doors and, within, vague lofty halls warmed by a pot-bellied base-burner; and no memory at all of the mother who had died there when she was three.

The memory of her father was clearer. David Ennis was a professor of Greek in a small Indiana college with a New England flavor. He was a blue-eyed, black-bearded scholar who did not know that Greek was antiquated and the Humanities a futile dream; a narrow, obstinate, impractical man, a little stupid for all his scholarliness and arrogant to bigotry in his austere Puritanic creed. He found his apotheosis in his chalky classroom. Xenophon and Odysseus and Paul the Tent-maker were virile and alive to David and he made his pupils share his sense of their virility and life. A few, each year, came to his house, ate enormous Sunday-night suppers and were apt, as the night waned toward ten, to pour out confessions of sin which

sounded incredibly similar and rather monotonous, though with a boy's surprised, halting voice in the room, the air seemed vibrant, every time, with strange dark struggle. . . .

A dozen of those boys, fair Greek scholars, went to some field of foreign missions, usually China. In his heart David thought of them as hearkening to a call of God, partakers of a heavenly calling. It did not occur to him . . . and it couldn't have mattered, anyway . . . that behind the Puritan who had rigid certainties about the mission field as a heavenly calling, behind the precise grammarian, was a vicarious adventurer, enthralled by visions of ships with windy sails at sea, and the magic of far countries. But a map of China, picked up in a curio shop, hung in the study where he talked with boys. It was a dim, heathenish affair, delicately colored, delicately distorted, with Chinese characters straggling down one side. Alluring. And David had dotted in scarlet the places where his pupils sweated in the vineyard. The dots glowed like fires, ruddy at night, glorifying the name of the Lord of Israel.

Diana Ennis saw very little of her father. He was out of the house before eight—a conscientious man, involved in all sorts of tyrannical duties—and hardly back before six. Her clearest recollection of him was at prayers, which David held immediately after supper was cleared away. Diana would bring him the Bible from the little table by the window and stand, a small thing in a clean gingham dress, with one hand on David's knee and the other twisting the curl at the end of her stiff braid, reeling off a jumble of psalms and texts in what must have been a blurry sing-song. Then she went back to her chair and hooking flat heels over a round, listened to his voice reading. Often

he got excited and read on and on for a long time. His prayers, very brief and colorless, Diana didn't remember, but the Bible was an enchanted Book, holding her entranced. It had nothing at all to do with religion. It was at church that she held up docile hands for the gifts of the Spirit, but they ran through her fingers and she came away singularly untouched by orthodoxy and not even troubled by a God of Vengeance. What she got from David's punctilious instruction was a delight in words and a forthright turn of speech that did shame, often, to her guilelessness.

When Diana was eight, her father married again; her mother's sister who was five years older than David himself. Libbie Ennis had a lissome body, a delicate heart-shaped face and widely opened gray eyes, eager and trustful. She was devoted to Diana. Indeed, all her acts revealed in her that very ordinary emotion, a love for children, though, being a virtuous woman, she looked well to the ways of her household and ate not the bread of idleness. If she became in time somewhat drearily convinced that this second marriage meant less to her husband than his first, meant very little save his comfort and a secure solicitude for Diana, she carried in her heart the compensatory pride that it was she who had given him his son.

To Diana, the baby Giles was a soft-mouthed doll, come captivantly alive. She never tired of him, of rocking him, of pushing his heavy carriage. She watched him sprawling on a soft blanket on the floor and went to her knees in breathless delight. "Thou art fair, my love," she crooned like a cradle-song, "Thou hast doves' eyes."

Doves' eyes he had for softness. But there was on him almost from babyhood an insouciance that was hard and impervious. Between them Libbie and Diana

spoiled him a little with a tenderness that lasted far too long. Giles learned, in a difficulty, to create about himself an atmosphere of bland unconcern into which he retreated gracefully like a rakish Puck, becoming invisible.

David Ennis became more remote. His children filled about the place that, in a man of less austerity, would have been given to the relaxation of an after-dinner cigar or a game of pool. The period of family prayers grew rather more stereotyped after Libbie shared it and when it was over he shut himself into his study with his class papers, his preparation in the Iliad and the Greek Testament, his contributory preoccupations. He saw them as preoccupations, not as a bulwark thrown up to defend him from a reality that bored him. . . .

Then when Giles was nine, David died. He had gone to a funeral on a raw March day with snow turning to opaque slush on the soggy ground and a wind that stabbed like a knife. He came home shivering. The cold he caught developed into pneumonia and he lay panting, breathing in short jerks, each one like a sword in his side.

Through a whole night Libbie and Diana watched together.

"He's sinking," Libbie said, "Nothing we do makes any difference. He doesn't try. He doesn't care to go on living; there isn't enough left to live for."

At breakfast, Diana told Giles.

"Father's very sick. He doesn't know us."

"Is he dying?"

"I'm . . . afraid. He's worse. Aunt Libbie says he doesn't try."

"But is he really dying?"

He was so little he didn't understand.

"I'm . . . afraid," Diana said.

"I'm rather glad," said Giles, "Now I shall have the Chinese map for mine."

A faint voice called . . . "Diana" . . . and she went out and up the stairs, running. There was a spreading stillness in the room. Libbie Ennis was standing by a window drawing the shade and when she saw the girl she gave a little groan and came toward her across the room. She put her arms around Diana and hid her face on her shoulder, clinging for comfort.

David was forty-six years old and he left an estate that netted about twelve hundred dollars. Libbie Ennis was fifty-one. Through a friendly superintendent who remembered her gentle ways with children, she secured a position in Anchorage and they moved there in June after Diana graduated from school. They rented a frail cottage in a by-street out toward the factory district; and while they were settling, still eating on the packing-cases in the kitchen, they talked incessantly, gravely about Diana's career. Her Life Work.

At eighteen, Diana Ennis was a rounded young thing with vague aspirations. They clustered, in the main, about a wish to work . . . at something so creditable as to leave unmarred an unconscious superiority she had known as the daughter of a college professor . . . and to get married in time. They had very little to do with money. She was of a class which consented, absent-mindedly, to indigence and walked not after the flesh but after the spirit. David's whole fine, meagre life had been lived on poverty's margin of stern essentials and his daughter inherited a curious blend of impracticality and uprightness and obstinacy.

It was characteristic of both women that they avoided the mention of Diana's marrying. Marriages

were made in Heaven and women of their sort did not stoop to expecting it. The utmost to which Libbie could bring herself was a fluttering suggestion of a Prince on a black charger: at best a vague contingency. And they faced the obvious problem of what Diana was to do. . . .

The curious thing was that there seemed to be so many things she could not do; and so few, so perilously few, that she could. Office-work, manicuring, dress-making, the telephone exchange were all unthinkable, as unthinkable as going out to service or on the stage. Even stenography was a long step down; and the training cost so.

If David Ennis had lived, his daughter would have gone to Normal School and become a teacher. The thought of it brought Libbie her first sacrilegious wonder if there could be compensation somewhere for David's death. But Normal School was out of the question now, and there was no position in Anchorage open to an untrained girl. It didn't occur to either of them that Diana might teach in a country school where the lack of training was merely a handicap. She was too young to go away from home.

That eliminated nursing, that romantic calling toward which Diana's own ambitions leaned, and art and social-service work. Of course, the ideal thing, for a girl situated as she was, would have been to give music lessons in her own home and sing in a church choir. Only, Diana wasn't musical.

If she was anything she was rather bookish. Libbie suggested library-work and when she saw the black depression that came down on Diana like a cloud, a bookshop. "If you could manage one on a hundred dollars, I'd gladly give it to you," Libbie said, "There

are so many things you can sell in a bookshop; those Perry prints and stationery and wallpaper and those raffia baskets that are all the rage. And take orders for hand-painted place-cards and china. I could help you. I did china-painting when I was a girl."

It was out of the discussion of her bookishness that there sprang Diana's certainty of her vocation. Writing. Journalism. She would write things for newspapers, for the Anchorage paper. She had always liked compositions at school and there was the Class Poem. Diana had been Class Poet, in High-school.

Libbie, protesting at the audacity, charmed by it, indecisive and fluttering, warmed to enthusiasm. Journalism was a gateway into wide fields of usefulness. If there were an opening on the *Anchorage Journal*, her future was practically settled.

If there weren't an opening, she would have to try being a librarian and write travel articles in her spare time. . . .

One morning, on an impulse compounded equally of these visions, the wish for a pair of new shoes, and raw energy, Diana made a scroll of the Class Poem tied with blue ribbon, and dressed herself carefully in the summer suit Libbie had just made for her.

It was a rough lavender cotton with a bolero jacket and a skirt *Princesse* which touched ground at the bottom and at the top was cut into a pointed girdle like a stomacher. With it she wore a thin white blouse which had twenty tiny buttons down the back and a frill of Valenciennes finishing the collar; and a hat, wide in front and nothing at all at the back, riding lightly above her pompadour. For a long time, Diana stood before the mirror trying to decide whether or not she would do. She saw a sun-browned face, quick eyes

under straight brows, short lips pressed together at the corners . . . but did she look like a journalist? She could not decide. She could decide nothing, not even the opening of the door when she came to the *Anchorage Journal*. Her stupid wilful body carried her past four times before her spirit, furious, compelled it.

When she stepped across the threshold, she found herself in a gray, narrow room like a vault. There was a mingled smell of ink, dusty tobacco smoke and insecticides. A counter of honey-colored wood, littered with scratch-pads and copies of yesterday's paper stretched from wall to wall, with a gate opening, at one end, into the space behind. There was a roll-top desk at one side smeared with marks of inky fingers; and further back there were several cubicles squared off by partitions of boarding, with electric light cords dangling into them from hooks in the high ceiling. Somewhere, there was the rattle of a typewriter and a hoarse thrumming pulsation that seemed to jar the frail building and the floor under Diana's feet. Later, she discovered that this was a gas-engine used to run the press, but at the moment the sound, rhythmic and monotonous, became the echo of her own heart-beat. . . .

A young man came out of one of the cubicles toward her. He was tall and dark with one shoulder higher than the other as if some malignant devil had clutched and twisted his body. He had a narrow, forward-thrusting face, the color of ivory; untidy black hair, parted in the middle, a compressed boyish mouth. His hands, slender and brown, were beautiful.

He looked at her, smiling as if he were going to speak, but as Diana lifted her eyes, and then turned them quickly away, the words died on his lips. His face

hardened and they stood through an awkward moment, staring at each other silently.

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The Anchorage *Journal* began as a country weekly after the close of the Civil War. Under various owners it knew fat years and lean years for a full quarter of a century, being passionately Republican and even more passionately personal. The columns of its early files were filled with sour invective worthy of Jeremiah, with disputations, with jeering ridicule poured out on Rebels, Copperheads, Democrats, Atheists, Woman's Righters and the rival papers that occasionally reared their heads in the county and went down into the dust of time. Beside the rancors of the editor, it published national news a week late, county court affairs, patent-medicine advertisements, obituaries and rubbish.

In the panic of '93, the *Journal* absorbed its rival of the moment and flourished for several years as a semi-weekly. Then it was purchased by a candidate for governor who tried to operate it as a daily in the interest of his political fortunes and who failed financially, almost at once. At its lowest ebb, Robert Wayne and Kent Amlie bought it. Wayne had been its reporter for three years and Kent Amlie, at twenty-one, was just out of college with a tiny inheritance which swung the deal. They paid twenty-five hundred dollars on an investment of thirty thousand and gave notes that held them, nose-down to the grindstone of poverty, for ten years.

But they had no leisure then or ever after to contemplate what they had done. They moved their second-hand equipment into an old store building on

the main street, signed contracts for paper, for stereotyped insides and in the second year when they had no money at all, and were paying an appalling interest, for their first linotype. Kent was apt to fall into fits of exasperation over the eccentricities of the drunken typesetters who wandered in ceaseless succession through the plants of the middle-west. He was a just employer and a decent one, but he had no patience with incompetence. . . . The linotype marked a point. Its presence in the building made wine-bibbers temperate as if they were confronted with a strange god; and until their uncharacteristic awe wore away, Bob kept it in the window, capitalizing on it, before the town, as evidence of the *Journal's* prosperity.

Robert Wayne was already a seasoned reporter with a streak of Yankee shrewdness, an easy camaraderie among the men about town and versatile capacities. He solicited subscriptions, job-printing and advertising, set type, attended court sessions, developed a ridiculous sporting column, smelled out news in hotels and barber-shops, went impartially to lodge dances and church suppers and wrote editorials when Kent went down fighting, under the lash of pain.

That happened rarely. From the first it was a point of honor with Kent to pace Bob's easy stride through the world and fall not a step behind. He lived, days at a time, with an overworked body and nerves that were like the stings of scorpions in his flesh. They turned him, infrequently, into a devil. In a black rage Kent was shocking to look at and to hear and for days afterward was unapproachable, with a bitter tongue. He was conscious that the world did not expect much of a handicapped man and his pride held that as a challenge rather than a pressure toward a lower level.

Life clamored within him that it was better to be anything than a nonentity. . . .

But he was extraordinarily sensitive. He shrank from first meetings, from the impression he made and his sensitiveness stood like a barrier between himself and other men.

To Kent, the *Journal* was an outlet for his lucid mind. He made himself its slave. Quite often, he worked like a maniac for twenty-four hours at a stretch and would look up from his desk after what seemed the briefest span of darkness to find that another morning had come and only a cold bath and black coffee stood between him and the day's work. He had ideals of a paper that should not be the creature of its owners, but a possession of the community which he must regard as a trust. Bombastic ideals. Because, after all, the *Journal* was a meagre little small-town daily, and no one in Anchorage knew this better than Kent Amlie or viewed the results of his efforts with greater derision.

Those early years of the century were swift with change. An ear on the earth caught faint trumpetings of events to come, mingled with the echoes of the decade just past. The fanfare of Spain's little war died out. The United States ratified treaties on a Panama canal and an Alaskan boundary. There was a war between Russia and Japan, Bismarck died in Germany, and Theodore Roosevelt was inaugurated President of the United States. Congress passed an Act for Rural Free Delivery. . . .

This was a swaying branch, caught at the edge of a precipice by two young men who had a newspaper bound to their backs, but it was strong enough to hold while they pulled themselves to safe ground. Rural

Free Delivery meant circulation for the Anchorage *Journal* in a field with a radius of thirty miles, a prosperous countryside filled with black-loam farms; it meant news darting back and forth across the county like a shuttle, weaving farms and hamlets and the county seat into one cloth. It meant more and bigger advertising.

The day before Diana Ennis summoned the courage to take her reluctant body and her Class Poem into its office, the paper showed a circulation of nearly twelve hundred copies and a record of six pages for three days in succession. The morning's mail had brought a contract for state printing. Kent, scrawling figures which represented profits, felt mounting within him such confidence in the future that he wanted to shout it from the house tops. He longed with a clamorous confused longing for someone with whom to share his exultation. He heard the screen slam and he got up and rushed out of his cubicle with the letter in his hand.

A girl was standing in a purplish blur with the light of the window behind her. Her hat which had slid on one side of a high pompadour, gave her an absurd look of eagerness. In a moment she was printed indelibly on Kent's mind; he missed nothing, neither the coltish grace of her body nor her gallant, rakish bearing nor the radiance of her vitality. He had wanted someone to share his triumph and this girl drove straight to the core of his longing. Then he saw the look of shocked compassion sweeping across her face; and he remembered what he was and how he would appear to a woman. A cold pain clutched him as if an icy hand had tightened on his heart. He stood dumbly challenging her hateful pity.

She averted her eyes and said:

"I've come here to work for you. My name is Diana Ennis and I am eighteen, which isn't too young. Is it? I'm quick to learn and I'll work for very little while I'm learning; but after that I'd want more, of course. I brought my Class . . ."

She broke off with a quick breath, like a gasp. In the act of pushing her ribboned scroll across the counter, her hand fell, the fingers curving slowly inward under the palm. Her eyes, turning anywhere but at Kent Amlie, fastened with a startled intensity on the figure of a young man, crossing the street? She asked, too quietly: "Who is that? Do you know? That man out there?"

Kent knew. "That's Robert Wayne. He is the man you want to see."

A smile deepened the corners of her mouth. "Oh . . . I see," she breathed, but her face held a delicious surprise. Presently he stirred, turning to Kent a clear gaze devoid of pity; and the astonishing thought crossed his mind that she could look at him without it because she wasn't really, seeing him at all.

She didn't see him. She swung slowly away to look again at Robert Wayne. He stopped with his hand on the screen, to talk to someone, she heard him laugh, . . . oh, it was endless, endless. But at last she saw him coming toward her with a look of winged pleasure brushing his face. Her own name rang in the room and his hand touched hers. Struck through with shyness, she took her fingers away and pressed them against her mouth, appalled to find they were icy-cold. He asked a question carelessly and Diana answered, hardly knowing what they said. After a pause he spoke a second time, and she knew that words did not matter, that he only wanted to hear her voice. She

looked up and saw his eyes, wide and full of light behind thick lashes, and his teeth pressing down into his lip.

In that silence life, like the dry rod of the miracle, blossomed into unimaginable loveliness. There was first, surprise and then a pure consuming rapture, a moment of exquisite delight when senses and spirit merged in a kind of ecstasy. . . .

Kent waited grimly behind the counter, thinking that it was a bitter thing to look at faces such as those before him. They flouted decency. Bob's eyes rested on the girl with a look that set Kent's pulses beating. The tumult which had begun in exultation changed to dread and a wild exasperation. For Robert was hiring the youngster recklessly, after two questions; and at six dollars a week which was only a little less than they paid vagabond reporters who blew into Anchorage, now and then, wanting a job. If she came there, into their lives, what would happen? Would Bob fall in love with her? If he did, who could stop it? Not he, Kent Amlie. He would have to stand aside and see his friend taken from him, lost to him . . . but flashing through the confusion of his thoughts went a suspicion that the loss of a friend was not the worst thing ahead. . . .

Robert Wayne had fallen in love with Diana. In a fortnight he told her so, standing with her under an old elm tree in the corner of the yard. The summer darkness hid them and he pressed a shoulder to the tree's trunk and pulled her close against him. For a long time neither of them said anything. Bob broke silence first:

"Say it's true, Girl. Say you love me."

"I love you. I adore you. There's no one like you in the world."

"Oh . . . my dear. Diana. . . . No, don't move.

Kiss me." He laughed a little, speaking through lips hardly opened, hardly kept from hers. He thought that he was warning her. "You don't know what you're in for, Girl. Are you sure you want me? I've not got five dollars in my pocket and I'm in debt for thousands. Perhaps we'll never get out. We'll be poor, perhaps, always." Then he kissed her.

"I've been poor always," Diana said.

"You're not afraid?"

"Not with you." She turned up her face with a young passion that left him a little faint. His arms tightened and he hid his face on her shoulder.

"I want you so much," he said slowly, "Diana, we've got to be married soon . . . oh, at once. We . . . I want you . . ."

They were married in August. They had nothing and no prospect of anything, so there was really no reason for waiting. Diana spent a fortnight's salary on her trousseau and was married in the lavender cotton, with a corsage of violets and freesias pinned to her bolero jacket. Her wide eyes shining above them were what Kent Amlic remembered of the wedding. Though he had done all he could to prevent the marriage, he was Bob's best man. It was he who suggested violets . . . because Diana Ennis was what she was . . . for her bridal bouquet; and lounging over a tossed mass of flowers, he selected the darkest, most perfect blossoms. . . .

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The whole of the next ten years was filled with unremitting struggle. It was like the struggle of pioneers breaking virgin prairie; they fought against a world that conceded nothing except what they might wrest

from it with their naked hands. They flung their youth and their quick keen wits into the conflict, ignoring weariness and pain and exhaustion; and not one day was sound with a certainty of the future. They had no certainty.

The recurrent note of that early struggle was not its toil, which was harsh enough, but its bitter penury. They were harassed with debts. All that the paper made seemed somehow to turn back into its maw; as if it were some legendary beast eternally devouring itself. Interest on notes had to be met quarterly and they saved the money for that, first, before they touched it for any need of theirs beyond bare living.

Their equipment was farcical: they had old presses, defective and worn, which, one after another, broke down beyond repair and had to be replaced. At the most inopportune times, the belt on the gas-engine which ran those presses, would slip off, bringing all work to a standstill and plunging the plant into Stygian darkness, so that the tinkering necessary to bring the monster back into service had to be done in a candle-lighted gloom, murmurous with strange oaths. Once . . . it was the only time the *Journal* failed to appear . . . something went wrong with the charcoal brazier where the pied type was melted and carbon monoxide filled the press room undetected until Robert and a printer to whom he was complaining of a headache toppled over at the same moment.

They had a crying need for printers who would arrive sober on Monday morning. For a second linotype. For new windowpanes and—when their ship came in—for linoleum on the splintering floor. They bought the linoleum first because Diana, who was wearing a couple of blotters in the broken sole of her shoe, ran a splinter into her foot and was laid up for

a month with an infection. It was down when she came back, a dingy gray masculine affair; and Diana, who loathed sniveling women, wept at the surprise of it. Bob, patting her shoulder, thought she was crying for joy, but her tears were shed because they had spent the money they were saving for a linotype and spent it all wrong; they had shattered her dreams of doing over the place in tans and creams that she was cherishing secretly as professing Christians cherish a dream of Heaven. Not till a good many years had come and gone did she live through another hour of such disappointment. . . .

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On the morning Diana came back from her honeymoon, she was behind the scarred counter in the *Journal's* office. She did not discuss with Robert whether or not a woman's place was in the home though it was a time when the leaven of feminism was spreading. Diana Wayne wasn't a Feminist. She worked because, after that reckless marriage, it was obvious that she must live on money which came from the *Journal* and that it was better if she could earn what her living cost.

Diana could not see that the work she did was drudgery. It was always very hard to make Diana see anything she didn't want to. She was obstinate and she had besides, the illusion that life was rich and gay and splendid. To imagine that three people could gather and present news in a county thirty miles square was imagining the impossible. For them to print a single edition on their presses was impossible. Every day, every hour was impossible and Diana veiled her eyes with illusions and refused to see how impossible it was,

considering it merely a matter of packing twelve hours' work into ten and working sixteen with a disciplined fury, if the occasion required, which it did, often

The truth was that Diana Wayne was in love, desperately in love with *The Anchorage Journal*. It was all curiously mixed with her young rapture and Bob's and she made no attempt to analyze it. The make-up of a column, the smell of old ink and insecticide were a riot and a sweetness in her blood and her infatuation put reverence in her heart. The days went by gloriously.

She had brought to her career, a culture based on those fragmentary Bible texts, the Alcott books and the better known poems of Longfellow and Whittier . . . a philosophy involving convictions that whatever is, is right and that God's in his Heaven, all's right with the world . . . and a queer passion and compassion for people which she did not understand at all. It was Kent Amlie who educated her; and he did it mainly because he had a bitter intelligence which filled him with the desperate need to find some meaning in the clamor of existence. He was driving through books and wanted to talk about them; but there weren't many people in Anchorage who would listen patiently to any talking about books, so he thrust them arrogantly upon Diana. And she and Bob would sit up at night, listening while Kent poured out what he thought of the delicate vagaries of Tono-Bungay, of Whitman and Shaw and Nietzsche and William James. . . .

With their rural delivery, Kent conceived the idea of county correspondence to take the place of the stereotyped inside pages that cheapened the paper. These could be filled with local items, clippings, taken shame-

lessly from bigger papers, and the advertisements their greater circulation would bring.

"We've the means to get the paper to the farmers," he told Diana, "but we've still to make them want it. They'll want it fast enough if we publish news about them . . . who's having threshers, or shipping hogs. We've got to find someone in every cross-road hamlet who can write us a weekly letter."

But it was difficult. Partisanship in the cross-road hamlets was the worst evil. There were too many neighborhood feuds.

"We have to maintain a reputation for truth," Kent fumed, "and they lie like hell. That old Baptist minister at Shasko Grove pays off a grudge in every item. There aren't three in the lot we can use." He was getting up at four o'clock to meet the early morning freight and get his sheaves of correspondence from the brakeman; because, by mail, it took two days, sometimes, from outlying villages, and, as it was, correspondents put off collecting news, forgot to mail what they had, distorted everything. "They won't even send in live stuff about neighbors they don't like."

Diana pondered dreamily.

"Let's try school-teachers, Kent. I'll get a list from the county superintendent's office in two-three days. I'll write 'em personal letters and offer ten cents an item and commissions on new subscribers. Ah, don't laugh; they'll snap at it. I would. They'll see how important it is to make this county page the biggest in the paper. All the farmers in the county ought to have the *Journal*. We're touching the whole wide fascinating world, and we can serve them. A paper . . . a rare, fine paper, like ours, is just manna in a wilderness."

Kent looked at her comically.

"Manna in a wilderness," he repeated, "You're a daft fool, Diana Wayne." He was facing her across the kitchen table which supported Diana's rickety typewriter and, at the moment, Diana herself, swinging her heels under a painted motto proclaiming that the uses of adversity are sweet. All at once, Kent began to tell her a legend about the Veil of Maya. . . .

* * *

Chris was born the day after Diana was nineteen. Pain engulfed her for a dreadful night, leaving her so exhausted that she was slow to recover; but a month after she left her bed, she was back at the plant. Fiddling. Doing odd jobs. Presently, she was there more than she was at home, where Sue Bush was sheltered with Angie. A five room house obviously didn't need the time of two women, and Chris was a healthy baby with Diana's chuckle. She fitted his schedule into her own, getting up an hour earlier to bathe him herself, stopping at home on her morning's round to nurse him and drink hot cocoa with Sue, and leaving the plant as soon as the paper went to press for an hour of play with him. The only difference was that she dropped into bed very early most nights, drowsy with weariness, instead of sitting up with Bob and Kent to talk.

When, two years later, Libbie Ennis died, Giles was added to the household. He was an engaging youngster and Diana still carried in her thoughts the delight she had in him when he was a live doll with which she played, but she found it hard to understand him. His elusive charm puzzled her, and the nonchalance she glimpsed beneath it left her sometimes, with a prick of heartache that did not last.

She was very busy. She went about the town, a familiar figure to many people she did not know at all, a thin girl, shabby and rather careless, with her hair in a heavy knot dragging at her neck and ink-stains on her fingers. She had an uncanny instinct for news. Behind the casual happenings of fires and accidents and weddings, she found a mass of news reflecting the activities of the people; behind the most ordinary story there might loom a bigger story like a grotesque shadow. Poking under the surface facts into motives and causes brought strange things to light. . . . She could not drop into the corner pool room, as Bob did, but she had a list of people who were not regarded, usually, as newsgivers: a priest, the woman at the corner grocery, the dour little Welshman, Owen Morgan, who saw a great deal from the dingy windows of his coal office, nurses at the hospital, clerks and telephone operators. Questions paralysed their tongues, but when Diana was wheeling Chris about, in the late afternoons, she stopped to gossip. What had happened to the Chinese baby who had come into the hospital with crushed ribs? Had Miss Gardner gathered from an Oriental explanation any hint as to what, really, happened? Were the Welsh Presbyterians going to have their new organ? Why had Christmas turkeys shot up to thirty cents a pound? What about the rumors of a strike at the car-shops? Had anything been heard from the boy whom Father Dunne had sent to Rome to finish training for the priesthood?

Diana lived, those years, at the heart of Anchorage. She had queer flashes of emotion for its sprawling growth, its troubled confusions, its people. They were her own people; men and women facing elemental facts like laughter and suffering, passion and birth and death as best they could. She had the sense of life raw, bit-

ter, beautiful, rushing turbulently under a smooth surface. . . .

They were bad years for Kent Amlie. The strain which did not slacken sapped his endurance, and at times, he went down in sharp attacks of pain. He refused anyone's pity, but the dark charm of his face was fined to a sharp edge and his temper was altogether unstable. Robert said to Diana: "Kent gets more savage and sharper-witted every day. He flaunts his form in the face of the Devil himself and I love him for it." But he got worse. Too many days he had the aspect of existing in some private hell which he quitted only to pour vitriol on Peeping Tom at its gates.

He puzzled Diana. The odd thought came to her that it wasn't only physical pain which tormented Kent, but something deeper, something in his spirit. After Chris was born she was aware of a change in him. He was courteous, helping her when she asked for help, but he ceased to give her anything of himself; he was impossibly arrogant and brusque and shut himself oftener into his bare room, his black moods.

One day she said:

"Be friends with me, Kent. Don't fend me off all the time. You ought to be the dearest friend I have on earth, except Bob."

"Do you need any friend except Bob?"

"I need you," She looked at him, smiling. "I won't be a burden to you or ask you to give up anything for me. But here's the three of us. We three; and we're going on all our lives, together. We're young men seeing visions, we need each other." It was characteristic of Diana to include herself. Her ambitions which had been indefinite had a clear contour after Chris was born. She had an extravagant energy and she wanted to use it; she wanted to make a success of living, to

find the bag of gold at the end of the rainbow. "I'm offering you something that's rare, Kent. Friendship's a rare thing."

"It's a hard thing."

"Hard?"

Kent spoke with uncontrolled bitterness.

"For me. My doors are locked and the keys are on the outside."

"You opened them to Bob. Why not to me?"

"One of our superstitions is that we deliberately choose friends. We don't; they come by some . . . some hidden law, not choice. You can never overcome a first, instinctive repugnance."

But she had been bringing herself to this interview for days and she made him one of the speeches she had prepared.

"I think friendship is the means of discovering oneself. One exists with friends and nowhere, else, really. Can't we try, Kent? Can't we take this thing that is hard and rare between men and women and make it a real thing for us?"

She watched the corners of his mouth tighten.

"I'm a damned brute, Diana," he said at last, "It's because I'm tired, sometimes, and sometimes lonely. I'll control myself better. Are you sure you want this?"

"More than I ever wanted anything."

"All right. I think I'd rather you didn't, but that's no matter. I'll be your friend. I promise I'll not fail you." He took her hand, looking at it frowningly as if he had something more to say. But he dropped it and went to the door. He turned there, found her eyes on him and smiled at her with a quick unexpected sweetness.

The Anchorage *Journal* grew. Kent, who had a trick of treating a human interest item as a poet would

a sonnet, was making a reputation with his editorials. The county news spilled out over three pages and they joined the Associated Press. Diana's column of personals became a Society Page and when the fad spread of pabulum for women readers, she established a Home-maker's Column. It was imitative, no different from a hundred others, not remarkable at all save that it was imbued with Diana's sympathy for people; but it was very popular. They added three reporters to the staff, increased the paper to twelve pages and were printing an average edition of six-thousand copies the year Diana was twenty-seven. The problem, then, was to keep the *Journal* growing with its city. . . .

Anchorage was growing fast. When they came there, it was little more than a country town, hidden under elms and maples not a century old. But it had changed and the countryside about had changed. Though a certain neighborliness lingered in the quiet white houses and shady yards, the town had quickened, spreading out over the prairie in wide ripples like circles spreading from a stone dropped into a still pool. It was a rich town, swallowing down its riches, a busy, turbulent town. The German and Irish hands who had worked in the mills thirty years before had given way to a raw-boned horde of Belgians and Lithuanians and Poles; and negroes were beginning to pour in from the south, strangely and silently, appearing in family tribes to create a city within a city, remote and hostile. There were the foundries and mills, belching smoke and soot, the car-shops vibrating with the pound of monstrous engines, the long, narrow streets filled with flimsy cottages. And against the background of that lusty growth was limned the complacent cultural efforts, the amiable piety and vague optimisms of an

ordinary middle-west community, satisfied with its growth, becoming dull.

But it was never dull to Diana Wayne. It was alive, exciting as she herself was alive and exciting. Their own success came evenly. The *Journal* was moved to a better building. Giles went to college and the war and came back as a reporter. The house rose on the knoll beyond the golf course. The paper which had existed in their dreams became, slowly, a reality; the circulation touched sixteen thousand and the new plant was begun. . . .

A good life. A life in which, for all its intensity, there was tranquillity, work combined with great stretches of country quiet: books, talk, hours in a garden in the early morning, long trudges with Chris over winter snows; and at the day's end firelight and lamplight and the close communion of a man and woman. This was marriage, this satisfying sense of fulfillment and this quiet trust.

* *
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The late afternoon sun lay on Diana's living-room like clouded golden water. She had been on the point of going out when Ace reported a caller waiting below and she had stopped only to take off her hat before descending to see her. From the curve of the stairway, she looked into the long room and saw a woman standing before the painting above the fireplace.

She was an unfamiliar figure, erect and gracile against the pale walls. Her sharp slenderness had an odd rigidity; and the startled thought struck Diana that only an extraordinary effort held her so motionless. She wasn't looking at the picture; she stood with

her arms folded close to her body and her head bent slightly, so that her mouth was pressed against one clenched hand. No . . . she was not concerned with the painting. She was merely standing there before it, as insensible as stone.

Driven by a soft-hearted impulse, Diana ran swiftly down the stairs. She had a glimpse of a pointed face, its straight profile outlined against the soft black ridge of furs and the light falling on a white throat. Then, unaware of her approach, the woman dropped her arms with a deep sigh and Diana saw, against the black chiffons of her frock, dark purple violets starred with freesias.

The blood drummed in her ears. Involuntarily, she looked down at her own flowers, paler, bluer, but no more faded; the others, too, belonged to yesterday. Her mind suddenly was seething with suspicions. What did it mean? Could these violets, worn by a stranger be the corsage she had lifted from the green box in Kent's office? Those had been dark . . . dark purple, not blue . . . and hers were blue. Their stale sweetish fragrance floated up to her, a sickening smell. She felt herself turning sick . . .

But the other woman moved stiffly and Diana struggled to regain her composure. She went quietly down the long room, sending her reason weaving like a shuttle through the confusion of her thoughts. Her suspicions were preposterous, her imagination was playing her a vulgar trick. Bob had nothing to do with these flowers. In their life together there was no room for another woman nor any place for suspicion. She was building a structure of supposition, madly, on nothing. Half the women in Anchorage were probably wearing violets and freesias, today; the florist would be clever enough to copy a successful order. And if the

order were duplicated by the same man in the same afternoon . . . Ah, she was involving Bob again. She was accusing her husband of . . . something: and on the mere glimpse of flowers like those which had a secret significance to her. She would make him shout, sometime, over the joke her nerves had played her. She thought: "Jealousy is cruel as the grave, a vehement flame," and was wondering from what the word came when she stood at the woman's side.

A hand reached out and brushed slim fingertips across Diana's corsage. A voice spoke, a husky voice, dulled and sullen.

"He keeps you in violets, too, does he? Both of us. Well, he would. He has no more imagination than . . . that. I am Helene Kennedy, Mrs. Wayne."

Her tone held Diana's attention. It was unkind, throwing down the name like a flung glove, but indifferent and detached, as if she felt that Diana knew the shameful things hidden behind it and that whatever she knew did not matter in the least. It had, too, the thin drained quality that women's voices have when their owners have been weeping. She did not lift her eyes and, in the silence strange cold currents of fear ran under the frozen surface of Diana's mind. She felt herself being sucked down into the dark whirlpool of her own terror and this woman's suffering. She looked at her steadily and tried not to imagine her lying in Robert's arms.

But that was difficult. Helene was lovely, with dark eyes and a disturbing mouth, thick and tender: an impressionistic woman without clear lines or colors anywhere, a woman that was mystery and passion in the flesh. The secret of her fascination, what, in her a man might desire, did not escape Robert Wayne's wife. It was intangible, the charm of magnetic

hands, of plastic abandon. And far from Diana's own.

"You must have heard of me," she said in her dulled voice, "Haven't you?"

"No."

Her lips moved stiffly to produce the syllable. She knew she had a hurt, here, to last a lifetime, but she meant to take it, all of it. If it had not been for an icy certainty within her, she would have refused to listen, but the certainty was there, hardening with every glance she threw at the woman's face; and she told herself grimly that she would have the facts, though they were knives in her heart and she died of the pain of them.

Watching Helene Kennedy, she knew that she would have them, that she would learn whatever concerned Robert; Helene would tell her because she was beyond attending any pain but her own. She was not thinking of Diana but of herself, her forces all turned inward; and Diana waited, in silence, marshalling her self-possession.

A moment later she saw that it would do her no good. For though she was equal to Helene's: "Of course, you know he's done with me," her poise crumbled instantly at her, "After eight years, there's some other woman. She's taken him . . ." and the mounting hysteria in the repeated words, "She's taken him away from me . . ."

Her own cry startled her.

"Why have you come to me?"

Helene Kennedy looked at her with a faint smile. "I wanted to see you," she said, "I've wondered, often, what you were like. And I wanted to hurt Bob . . . cruelly as he has me. He's tortured me. It will hurt him, you know, to have me come here. He hates unpleasantness."

Unpleasantness.

"There's some other woman. There must be . . ." Helene said, panting, "Why would he be trying to get rid of me if there weren't someone else. Do you know . . . who she is? No . . . I suppose you don't. Would you tell me if you did? I must know, I must know. I can't endure this . . ." Her voice rose and dropped on the next word with a breath of contempt, "I'm not like you."

"You mean you've thought I knew, all these years, about you."

"Haven't you? Haven't you guessed? How could you help it?"

There was a long silence.

"But that doesn't matter, now; you know, now. You might as well hear the whole of it, the worst." The words came muffled, between long pauses, "I've never been in Anchorage before, of course. When we've been together it's been in Chicago or New York or slipping into St. Louis when Bob had a trip down-state. We took no chances with Anchorage."

"You've taken wild chances, now."

"Yes . . . Oh, I had to come. I couldn't stand it any longer. Queer things have happened, lately. Bob's been in town, in Chicago, twice, three times, and never even telephoned me. He's always telephoned me, always. We never wrote; we couldn't. But when he came in, he'd call me, the first moment, from the station. I never knew when he was coming. I've spent most of my days, for eight years, listening. Only for a day or two, for a week after he'd gone, I wasn't listening for a bell to ring."

She looked up and Diana knew what torment that listening had been and the cool peace of the day after he had gone. "He has been her lover," she thought

and winced away from the crude pain that beat at her throat. He had trusted to the woman's reticence, to a decent delicacy of mind; and at the first strain Helene broke. She had no delicacy, no reticences. Under the flood of her emotion, the defences she had piled up so carefully, crumbled away.

Diana struggled with a sense of living in some dreadful dream and her thoughts knotted again on the fact of Helene's beauty. She was beautiful, with a loveliness fostered by ceaseless solicitude; and she wore her beauty superbly, arrogantly as if it were a magic jewel. It was her talisman and she was confident of its irresistible power.

"I shouldn't have come just now," Helene said, "He's bothered with moving into some new plant and these men taking up his time. He looked so tired last night, I couldn't bear it. I'd not have come, if I'd known. . . . But, no, I had to come; I had to. I couldn't stand it any longer. I had to find out what had happened to change him. He said, last night, that a man's silence ought to tell a woman all that was necessary. But what does a silence mean, after eight years? I cannot bear suspense. If he was done with me I wanted to know it. But I couldn't think he was really done with me. I can't. He's been all I've had. . . . I've never been really happy except in the scattered hours I've spent with him. I'd had a rotten marriage . . . my little boy died . . . I've been so lonely . . ." She flung up her head and said in a different voice, "I didn't want it in the beginning. I didn't want Bob to love me, but he did love me. He took it out of my hands. He's been so dear to me, so tender. . . . We met, first, at a dinner, just an ordinary dinner, with people we both knew; and almost at

once we found we loved each other. He can't deny it. He did love me . . ."

"He loved me, too," Diana said. But her voice sounded thin and sharp, like the other woman's.

"Not the way he did me."

She found that comic, remembering the young rapture they had shared, their gay, brave wayfaring along a hard road, together. Only her mind, disciplined to search behind every event for its causes, began mechanically to reckon up the facts. Eight years. Chris had been nine. It was the year they left the cottage, the first year they had really prospered. Did a man turn restless as soon as money pressure lightened? What sent men from one woman to another? What had this woman given Bob that she had not? She had again the vision of Helene Kennedy in Robert's arms and came out of it to say:

"You are cruel."

"If I am, I can't help it. He's torn me to bits. There'll be nothing left of me when I'm through this. I don't know how I can live. How can I live in pain like this? It may be thirty years, yet . . . forty years. How can I?" She lifted her face and her eyes empty of expression, stared at Diana with a dark intensity. "Forty years . . ." she repeated after so long a silence the connection was almost lost. "I could endure it, perhaps, if I understood what had happened; but he won't tell me. He was gentle . . . oh, adorably gentle . . . but he wouldn't tell me anything. He hated hurting me. . . . Don't you know, Mrs. Wayne? Don't you know what's changed him? Oh . . . you must. I can't believe it isn't some other woman, someone new. . . . Oh, why do you look like that?" Her eyes swept up and stopped at Diana's face,

It was shrunken and blanched like an old woman's face. Something in it steadied Mrs. Kennedy. She spent a long moment twisting her furs about her shoulders, looking at it with eyes that, slowly, grew curious. Slowly, her manner became gentle, almost debonair.

"Listen, my dear," she said, "You don't . . . care, do you?"

"About your affair with my husband?"

"You're not in love with him, I mean. Surely you've been married long enough to . . ."

"Did Bob ever say I wasn't in love with him?"

"No . . . of course not. But I've had the impression that you were one of these cold women . . . that you didn't care very much about . . . I've been sorry for Bob."

"Have you?"

"He's almost never mentioned you," Helene said slowly, "I knew he was married . . . he told me that, almost at once . . . and had a boy growing up. And I knew you worked on his paper. I've thought that marriage was a side-enterprise for you as much as for him. It is, I know, with most women who work. They're cold to men. And naturally, from the way he came to me, I thought you had some arrangement . . ."

"Oh, please . . ."

"Understanding," Helene supplemented, staring. "At first, I admit, I hoped you'd divorce him, for I knew he wouldn't divorce you. He's too kind . . . and there was the child, of course. But when I realized a divorce wasn't . . . expedient, I thought you knew about this and didn't care. I'm not making excuses for myself. I've known all along that Bob wanted the thing kept secret; but I flattered myself that was on my account. I accepted the secrecy until this week . . ."

Her voice trailed away. Diana looked at her and saw a stinging pity gather on her face, but nothing more because her own eyes dimmed. There were no tears in them but her sight failed and the pain swelled in her throat so that she put her hand against it.

"You've grounds for divorce in what I've told you," Helene said, "But what's the good of that, now? Five years ago, perhaps, when he'd have married me, there'd have been some use of it. Now, he'd only turn to this other woman . . ."

Diana shut her eyes, having a second of weakness when she was close to humiliating tears. She escaped it and turned to walk away.

"I'm sorry," Mrs. Kennedy called after her, softly, "I was so sure you knew . . ."

Diana made a faint, banal gesture of her hand. She began to mount the stairs, stumbling a little.

IV

THE house was very still. The sound of the dinner-gong, soft and musical, stole through it and died murmurously away. As she went downstairs, Diana remembered that Robert was dining at the Anchorage club and a hazy relief penetrated the stupor of her mind. With the other men of her household she was not concerned; only with her husband. But, Ace told her, she was alone. Giles and Chris both were out and even Peniel had telephoned to say that he was staying for supper with Owen Morgan. The man's voice, which seemed to come from some immense distance, sharpened and Diana looked up to see a startled solicitude on his face. Mechanically, she sat down in the chair he drew out for her, wondering how she was able to eat dinner at all.

She wasn't able to eat. The soup appeared, cooled, and vanished, followed by a casserole; and, after a long time, she saw Ace's bronze hand take her plate and was aware of the distilled fragrance of coffee. "I'm not hungry," she explained rather hurriedly, pushing back the cup, "Tell Blanche her dinner is very nice . . ." Her hand moved across her chest, pressing her throat. She got to her feet. "I'm going out for a bit, Ace," she murmured, "It's so lovely, outside." She groped in the hall closet for a coat and went slowly out of doors.

She was not conscious of any emotion. She felt only indifference, a heavy weariness. But the chill wind sent the blood bubbling into her head and she

staggered a little with a dizzy sense of being awakened as if some monstrous hand were grasping her shoulder, shaking her out of sleep. An intolerable wakening. Pain was in her, spreading through her body. She walked a few steps from the terrace and stood still, swaying forward, her arms folded across her waist.

She shut her eyes and fought to deny the pain. She would not have it. Things like this might happen to other women, but not to her. Not to her. It could not happen to her. Helene Kennedy had lied. "Bob, you didn't," she cried. "You didn't. This isn't true . . ." but it had gone on eight years.

That was the aspect of disaster which clamored insistently for recognition: the element of time. It was not a swift impulse, which was forgivable; it was deliberate, lasting infidelity. Helene Kennedy had been her husband's mistress for eight years. Conviction gathered in her, slowly, crushing denials, overwhelming her. She stared at the certainty of her mind and tried to realize exactly what had happened; and again, as if she had parted with all decency, she saw Robert and Helene in each other's arms.

A rasping chuckle tore through her throat and she pressed her hand over her mouth, walking uncertainly along the flagstone path into the garden. She was thinking clearly but round and round in circles, the same thing again and again. She had failed; her devotion, the quality of her love had not been enough for Robert. He tired of me, she thought. I didn't give him enough. My love wasn't enough. She's so very lovely. He was tired of me, and she was lovely. . . . She thought of Helene impersonally, as the woman who had taken Robert for eight years, but that impersonal disdain was like a cold river on which Diana drifted, carried into a flood of shame and self-derision.

She had been a fool. She had been a self-satisfied wife, content, believing that her husband was as happily content as she. She had seen herself as secure, possessing his inalienable devotion. No shadow of suspicion had come to her; and if it had, it would have seemed causeless, no more than a random surmise, to have suspected Robert of unfaithfulness. His absences provided their own excuse and she had accepted them incuriously: she had crushed back unacknowledged, her concern at his occasional indifference, explaining it as the sequel of preoccupation in a dozen prospering phases of existence; she had believed his repeated protestations that he loved her. The vulgarity of such protestations! But she had begged for them and he had met, smugly, her intensity of feeling. No . . . she had never doubted that their love had lasted. She had kept the magic of life untarnished, had held herself a temple for his worship.

A fool. The sickness of humiliation swept through her and she felt nauseated and faint as if it were an actual poison in her veins. The sundial loomed before her at the end of the path. She stood unsteadily above it, gripping the cold stone with both hands, her shoulders heaving, her forehead damp with sweat. "How he has lied. . . ." She spoke in a whisper, each word a strangled effort, "He was with her last night . . . and the night before."

The rage which had been smouldering under that illusive apathy leaped and crackled suddenly, like a flame. Her indifference had gone; her humiliation became bitterness, a bitterness flickering with points of hatred. She had a kind of wild joy in yielding to her own fury. It swept away all restraint and delivered her into an abandonment of anger. Her house, a steep-pitched bulk in the dusk, drew her eyes and the desire

swept through her to do it violence, to destroy all that it held. She wanted to smash in its lighted windows, to break chairs, to cut its rugs and draperies into ribbons . . . and leave them contemptuously scattered, the visible evidence of its ruin. "Leave it," she gasped, "Leave it . . . him, tonight. They've done for me, he and that Helene, between them. I'll divorce him."

But the whirl of her thoughts stopped at the word "divorce." She straightened herself slowly, and turning, walked through the gate that led to the golf course.

The soft grass was pleasant under her feet. The trees floated in an opaque mist above the water hazard and the wind, slipping over the grass, brought the smell of damp earth to her nostrils. The quiet touched her and her fury, obliterated at its height, left her with a feeling of emptiness and unconcern. Her rage, she thought, had consumed a great deal; her belief was gone, and her love destroyed from within. She felt only a clear indifference. It seemed a pity.

Resolutely, she drew her wits about her, trying to think evenly. She was curious about Robert. Had he been trying to snatch wilfully from life, something it had failed to give him? Had his marriage been so much less than he hoped that he could not adjust himself to the meagre happiness it offered? In that case, the failure was hers; but how had she failed him? She confessed to misunderstanding what happened in a man's soul when he dreamed of romance. The inner mystery of Robert's mind was as inscrutable as his face, and for all their close companionship, no knowledge of him served Diana now. How could he have been unfaithful to her? It was useless to keep asking that . . . her memories of their life together were like so much wind-blown chaff.

She skirted the pool under the trees and mounted the rising ground beyond. The thought of Helene Kennedy occupied her obscurely for a little, but the woman seemed unsubstantial, less flesh and blood than a symbol of infidelity. An infidelity that lasted eight years. For eight years Robert had warmed himself at that magnetic flame. . . . And the woman had become a habit, with him. Most things turned into habits, naturally, with Robert, since the expected fitted better into the unadventurous routine of business. It would be like him to make romance, passion, habitual. This one had lasted a long time and then, for some reason, he had tried to slip out of the bonds that had held him. He had attempted to end the affair with silence, but Helene had not been able to endure silence. She had come to him, demanding the truth. And she had come at the wrong time. . . .

That was Helene's mistake. Robert would have hated her intrusion into the pressing business of the past three days; but, for all that, Helene had some unrelinquished hold on him. On the first night, in the turmoil of moving to the new plant, he had gone to her; and hurrying away, had blundered by locking those needed keys in his desk. Yesterday he had remembered to send her flowers; and last night, again, he had gone to her the moment he could leave his own house. It was Helene who had driven with him, last night. . . . And he had not broken with her, then. He would put off the moment as long as possible; until he was angry he would compromise and procrastinate. But anger was likely to make Robert brutal. That had happened today. Helene's emotion was too ungoverned to have lasted very long; she had had no time to recover from shock and get herself in hand

before she rushed, on an impulse of sheer cruelty to Diana. Robert had broken with her that day.

He had broken off with her. That fact, irrelevant to all she was thinking, swam to the surface of Diana's mind. She stopped, wearily, on a smooth green to consider it. The affair with Helene Kennedy was ended. For another woman? Was there still a third woman, even less substantial than Helene seemed herself? Diana doubted that. It was more likely that Robert, with his innate caution, was looking to the future. He would want to clear the slate, to erase any blots of the past so that they could not appear under the writing of the months to come. His break with Helene was a matter of expediency; he was putting her out of his life to shield her as much as himself, to make certain that the white light of a political campaign could play upon his life and not find her in it. But he must have been very sure. He must have been sure that no one knew the history of the past eight years. . . . And he had counted on Helene's acquiescence, her decent reticence. Well, she had failed him. Though Bob didn't know it, she had let him down worse than he had ever been let down in his life.

The truth would come out when Diana divorced him. That still lay ahead. The fact that Helene had ceased, suddenly, to be his mistress had no bearing at all on the fact that he had betrayed his wife. An increasing excitement flowed through her. She knew very little about the processes of divorce and nothing read or heard that she could recall threw any light on her individual case. It was the form for a fact already made known, a broken marriage. Where, primarily, it affected their property, their home, lawyers would know what to do; but there were consequences to her-

self which must be faced and these perplexed her. Her perplexity consisted of all the conflicting emotions and ambitions that, together with love, had gone to the building of their life; and the outcome of these seemed to lie far in the future, the final result of two antagonistic forces, pulled by the minor issues of circumstance. She refused, now, to think of them. She was less conventional, more ruthless by far, in brushing traditions aside than Robert. What else could she do but divorce him? Beg him? Try to win him back? She did not want him back. Her indifference held her, caught, in depths where not even Robert mattered.

She had come out on the other side of the golf-course nearer Anchorage. Beyond the clubhouse lay curved streets, new streets, with lamps making pools of light, along their shadowy pavements and little neighborly houses set in wide yards. She stood, looking along the dark street, chilled and tired and longing, suddenly, for some human contact that would keep her from thinking. . . .

* *
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Diana sat in a big chair in Kent Amlie's living room.

She had no very clear idea how she got there. Kent lived in a bungalow on one of the curved streets; and when she reached that street, Diana passed his house and walked beyond it and back up the block. His windows were ruddy. There was an odd comfort in thinking of Kent, immersed in a book, somewhere behind them. She crossed at the corner and went down the other side; and as she came back, she heard his voice call: "Diana," and saw him, a high-shouldered

shadow in the rectangle of his lighted doorway. "I thought that was you," he said, "You're coming in." As she went up the steps, he looked at her closely, "Diana . . . you look done in. I've never seen you like this."

"I've been walking."

"But in grass? Your shoes are soaked through."

She thrust out a foot and looked at it.

"They're quite spoiled, aren't they? I ought to have changed."

"Take them off. Go in by the fire. I'll get you some slippers."

He disappeared into an inner hall leading to the bedrooms. Presently, he was back looking singularly ill-tempered. He stood over her, frowning as she put on his slippers.

"Have you been walking long?"

"Since dinner. What time is it, now?"

"Half-past ten. You're shivering. What shall we drink? An orange-blossom? Port?"

"Wasted on me," said Diana, "Wine is a mocker. I'd probably turn squiffy at once, and you'd have to call a cab to get me home."

"I'll make you some tea."

"Kent dear, you can't make tea. It would be dreadful. Don't. I'm a bit tired but I'm not at all hungry."

He went out without replying and after a minute it came to her with a shock that he had asked no questions whatever. He hadn't said: "What's the matter with you, Diana?" or "Why have you been walking in wet grass, you blithering idiot?" Probably he knew; for he did know most things that concerned Robert Wayne. The fact that he made no inquiries tightened the dull conviction on her mind like screws fastening a lid on a box. She thought: Why don't I ask him,

outright, what he knows? Better throw decency to the four winds than endure this. But he'd not tell me. There is nothing he can tell me. He is Bob's friend . . ."

Kent came back with a tray balanced on the palm of his hand.

"I had the crackers in the oven," he said, pushing up a small table, "and there's Camembert, which you like. But the tea seems rather black."

It was black and very bitter. Diana sipped it, forgot that she wasn't hungry, and eating crackers and cheese placidly, looked about her.

The masculine severity of Kent's house always gave her a feeling of content. In it Kent himself seemed different. Anchorage at large rated him as a solitary, somewhat eccentric man, and politicians, daughters of joy and some ministers avoided him, for he had a quick perception of sham and a biting irony for the more pompous gentilities. There was in him that erratic principle of growth against which the passive resistances, the avidities and repressions of an average town wages a constant war of attrition. Softer men yield or grow bitter in rebellion, but Kent Amlie merely walked about grimly, making uncomfortable remarks. Only in his own house or Robert Wayne's did he take off his armor.

He had dropped down at the piano and sat hunched tensely over the keyboard. He was a finished musician. His playing was an early distraction, carried over from the childhood when, watching other boys storming across playing-fields, Kent needed a stern solace. He began a broken melody wrought of barbaric color that flicked Diana on the raw. She did not understand music and it hurt her, left her defenseless and quivering. She sat stiffly upright with a puzzled face turned

to Kent and, as if he guessed that he was troubling her, he changed to a firm calm harmony, severe and cold as moonlit marble. Like peace, Diana thought.

The flames were reflected in copper andirons and along the polished floor. Lamplight fell on the white keyboard, on the shabby crimson leather of the chair where Kent had been sitting, on the yellow pottery of the tray. Beyond these patches of light, the room was lost in obscurity in which loomed a dim tapestry of books, a few etchings set against the misty walls, a ship's-model, delicate and shadowy on the mantel and, on the corner of Kent's desk, a slight bronze figure that Diana had given him, a youthful Apollo, standing with bent head and lifted hand as if, above the sounds of the world, he were listening to something far off. There were books everywhere, spilling over tables and shelves to chair-arms and the floor: heavy books with thick wide-margined pages; books bound in leather that held the odor of smoke, novels in bizarre jackets, poetry, the romances of exploration and war. Kent left the piano and Diana defensively picked up the nearest, bending her head as she thumbed the pages.

"Looks interesting," she murmured, "Is it any good, Kent?"

Kent slumped into the red chair. "I like it. It has rich, strong color and strong, subtle human emotions. It shocks most people, particularly women; really shocks them, beyond the conventional agitation over bedroom scenes. It angers them. The things it says about marriage are so true they shouldn't be put into words."

"I haven't read it."

He reached for his pipe and held it tenderly, pressing tobacco into the bowl.

"It's the story of a man who broke his marriage wide open for another woman. He was quite an ordinary man, successful enough and conventional, except that he was cursed with a cold brain which persisted in examining all that happened to him, in an attempt to explain himself to himself. If he could have explained himself to his wife as well, the catastrophe might have been averted; but he couldn't. She wasn't that sort."

"Wasn't what sort, Kent?"

"The sort to give a man a hearing."

Her breath caught in a gasp. He knows what has happened, she thought, he must know. But he wasn't certain that she did. This talk about a book hung like a veil between his suspicions and his uncertainty.

"A thoroughly nice woman whose whole life was woven of conventions and complacency," he went on. "She assumed that love was the supreme affair of life and couldn't change. That's a common viewpoint. The average woman lives in a glamorous love-affair, seeing herself as a goddess and her husband the priest of her altar who exists solely for her domestic service. It sounds idiotic, put into words, but women fight to the death for it. This woman did, she wouldn't listen when the man tried to tell her the truth. She was exactly the sort of woman to be shocked by the sort of book it is. She'd have called it indecent."

But he reached out and took the book from Diana's hand, as if it were a dangerous thing for her to hold. Her eyes grew darker and a shadow closed on her face.

"You think she should have given him a hearing."

Kent nodded, casually.

"It would have been the decent gesture. She might

have tried to understand him. There, of course, one comes immediately to the ancient query as to whether there can be any understanding between men and women. Many wise men have denied it. Myself, I don't know. I cherish the hope of evolving comprehension between the sexes, in time, but no woman has ever taken the pains to prove it to me. I have accepted a defeat written on the books when I was born into this droll Darwinian world."

Diana said gently: "You accept defeat too easily. Women like you, Kent."

"I know. I've been able to scale the walls of some of the gardens that grow about women, and they are delightful places. But there is a difference between being in a friendly garden and knocking at the door of a temple with a hope that it will open for you."

"Have you ever knocked at the door of a temple?"

"No," Kent said blithely.

Diana's hands relaxed on the arm of her chair. He doesn't know, she thought, I was mistaken. His voice wouldn't have been so unconcerned. They were only talking about a book, about a woman in a book. Kent liked speculative discussions when thoughts crystallized into opinion. She had been supersensitive; her fear that Kent knew of Helene Kennedy was a delusion of her own quivering nerves. Her weariness had given way, now, to a sense of ease. Already it was difficult to think of herself as the woman who had clung to the sundial in that sick torment of anger. The house of a friend, she reflected, smiling at him, . . . a rest wherein ye cause the weary to rest.

"You like my metaphor, I see," said Kent, "I do myself because it's so masculine. It must be the image

most often created in a sentimental man's heart: a woman's love, a temple: Sanctuary. The inner sanctuary where she guards him, where he can flee when he's accused."

"And be given a hearing? You make it sound like a confessional."

"Don't I? Perhaps the idea is vaguely included, but, I've already pointed out, as a confessional, it's a failure. Rather early, in most marriages, that shrine in the temple is locked. A man learns the danger of trying to explain himself. We are pathetic fools, Diana."

"Pathetic?" she repeated sharply.

"We're so restless," Kent said, "There's not enough fighting and buccaneering adventure; wars, these days, are so deadly we can't have them, often. There's a fierce struggle about business but, in time, even a business, particularly if it's successful, becomes a rather stereotyped routine, a struggle in stagnation. If a man could start a new career at forty . . . but he can't. The same thing is true of marriage, doubtless. It has certain drab aspects, with restlessness at the heart of tranquillity. And romantic fools go seeking . . . something. Diversion? Adventure? Youth? It would take an unusual woman to understand that."

Twenty-four hours before she would have laughed at him in sheer derision. She would have said: "But you aren't married, Kent. You don't know anything about marriage. It isn't drab; it's thrilling. Love doesn't change; it deepens and steadies but it doesn't change. Look at Robert and me. . . ." She would have believed all she said. Now she spoke flatly.

"A woman would have to be made of stone to accept infidelity with indifference."

"She wouldn't. But she might, if she used her rea-

son, bring herself to understand its causes. Good God, Diana, love, with most men, is an accident: and passion always is. It's inexplicable to the very man who's driven by it. But I find that most of life is unintelligible. Don't you? Probably, we couldn't endure an intelligible one. If we really knew why things happen, we'd have no hope left."

Diana shook her head and the look of pain tightened her mouth.

"Oh . . . that's not true, Kent," she said, stumblingly, "You don't believe it."

He gave her a queer sweet look, "I believe this," he said, "I believe that the whole of a human experience, the whole meaning of a man's life is simply the pattern his will weaves on the surface of chaos," and began abruptly to talk of Robert, Robert's future. Diana listened quietly. The things Kent said were not new to her; she could have said them all as convincingly herself.

"He's always had this dream. Don't you remember how we talked, fifteen years ago, of having Bob, sometime, go into politics? For all it's a dusty life, there's some splendor in it; and he's as likely a candidate as you'd find in a month's walk. He's better posted than most, he owns a paper which is something in the way of influence, and men like him. He has the trick of convincing other men that their ends are the same as his, of making friends. We've been talking about his campaign this afternoon. He would have a good chance of election if he fought for it alone, but with Cretcher's organization behind him, it's a certainty. We're convinced that it's to our advantage to take in Raedel. He's a ruthless priest to the god of expediency, but there aren't many men who stay true to themselves.

He's no worse than others. It's just that as one's pretty ideals come into contact with reality, the brightest go to the wall. Raedel's gone through that."

Diana sat still, her hands lying in her lap. Kent's voice went on and she lost herself in her own thoughts.

Robert, too, had gone through that. Some of his ideals had gone to the wall. The very words that Kent was using . . . "opportune," "compromise," "expediency," were Robert's words. It had always been possible for him to compromise, on occasions which furnished their own excuses, with his more uncomfortable integrities, and if he could compromise with integrity he could with fidelity. Why not?

The idea came to her that there must have been other women in his life. It was hardly likely that a man like Robert Wayne, vigorous and handsome and successful, would live without women . . . if he wanted them. Helene Kennedy might not have been the first, and she wasn't likely to be the last. But it was Helene's betrayal of their liaison which would give Diana grounds for a divorce. It had lasted eight years. . . . A trembling of the rage that had swept her out of herself went through her, but it was only faintly sinister, like the roll of thunder after a destructive storm. "I can divorce him," she thought steadily, "I can do that."

Divorce was explicit, definite, the first step to take. But though it was easy in theory, the reality presented difficulties to Diana's mind. What, exactly, would it mean? To a man and woman whose lives were woven together by the threads of habit and parentage, it meant destroying the whole fabric of living. One might argue that it was not the divorce decree which tore life to rags, but the thing for which the decree was granted; but Diana did not argue that. She was thinking that

it would be a disaster, at this time, when Robert's life-long plans were coming to their fruition. . . . Her thoughts held a confusion of phrases: "She will do him good not evil . . . Her husband is known in the gates, where he sitteth among the elders . . ." and behind the worn words was a vague horror of the vacancy of life without him.

Besides, there was Chris. More than herself, more than Robert, Chris must be considered. He was the steadfast reality in their lives. He had grown up in a house where there was happiness, and she wanted him happy as long as he could be . . . before, that is, he was involved in the grimly realistic era that was his own. Whatever disaster befell his father and mother, Chris might be able to make life a gorgeous thing if they stood by a little longer. Chris . . . for the first time he seemed to Diana a separate entity, apart from Robert, and she had a vision of his bare brown throat and his cheek, red under its tan, like a sun-sweetened apple. Oh, they must think of Chris . . . Kent had said something important, a while back. What was it? Give a man a hearing. . . .

Of course, of course, that was the decent gesture. Of course, she need come to no decision, yet; she need not think of divorce or separation from Robert or the emptiness of life after it, until she had talked with him, frankly. Frankness was like ointment laid on a wound. The simplicity of her training, which had deserted her in that first agony of anger, reasserted its sway and hope poured through her in a strong stream of relief. She looked up as Kent's voice stopped and smiled at him with parted lips. As if by chance, her radiance came startlingly, vividly to life.

Kent moved restlessly and the light fell on his face. It had an odd look of exhaustion, Diana thought. She

saw tiny beads of perspiration on his forehead, the white spots at his nostrils, the twitching of little muscles under the skin. She stood up, swiftly.

"I'm going home, Kent. It's late."

"I'll take you. I'll run out the car while you change your shoes."

But as he came from the inner hall with a raincoat and battered hat, Giles's voice accosted him from outside the screen.

"Wee Willie Winkie, tirling at the lock. Are the good folk in their beds? It's after . . . what is it after, anyway? Have you two an idea?"

He spoke playfully as if the nursery rhyme were a joke that meant nothing; but his suave voice trailed unspoken implications. Diana felt it directed critically toward her with the cynicism of a very young man acquainted with indiscreet women.

"I can see that I must take my charming sister home," Giles said.

He waited until he had started his car; then he began.

"What in the world were you doing there?"

"I wanted to see Kent."

"My God! Don't you see enough of Kent? What you find to talk about I can't think."

Diana laughed. "Don't think, darling. There's no occasion for reflection."

"It's what other people might think."

"Are you suggesting that you disapprove of my calling on Kent?"

"I am suggesting," Giles said blandly, "that discreet people preserve the appearances, at least."

Diana did not answer. For the rest of the way home neither she nor Giles spoke at all. Diana, because a dreary impatience was rising in her and she was afraid

that, if she tried to speak, she would weep instead. "Self-pity would make a fool of me, now," she told herself warningly, "and I'll not cry before the cynical little beast."

But she did. Before she was aware of them, tears spilled down her face. Giles chose to ignore them and she cried soundlessly, her hands pressed tight against her wet cheeks.

* *

*

Diana lay motionless in her bed, listening to the muffled sounds in her husband's room. There was no light in hers and no sound but the drip of rain from the eaves above her windows. She could hear the closing of the closet door, footfalls against the rug, the opening of windows.

There was a dull ache in her throat and her hands were hot and dry. She was frightened to find herself losing the confidence on which she had laid hold in Kent's house, slipping into a numbed bewilderment. What should she do? Go into his room, when he had turned off his light, draw the arm-chair close to his bed and begin: "Robert, I want you to tell me . . . ?" Or should she call out to him to come to her? She groped after her scattered thoughts, trying to fit them into some clear pattern. The door opened softly and she was conscious of Robert's presence in the darkness, "Diana," he murmured half-audibly, "Diana, are you awake?"

"Yes."

"I've been hoping you would be, all the way home." He sat on the edge of the bed and laid his hand against her throat. "I've been coming home in my mind, the whole beastly evening." She did not answer and in a

moment, he slipped his arms about her. His head rested on her shoulder and his face was hidden.

"Don't move," he whispered, "I like you like this. You rest me."

Her body grew rigid. She thought suddenly of his first kisses which had opened to her gates of intimate joy. He kissed her, now, and a wave of emotion beat through her, leaving her breathless.

"I love you. What a warm soft thing you are. I do love you. I love every sweet secret of you. My dear. My sweet."

It was worse than she believed possible, far worse. His caresses were offered with a deeper tenderness than usual. It was unbearable to have him offering a gift she did not want; and she hated herself because she quickened at his touch. She felt his lips move against her cheek, heard his breath of laughter.

"You might say that you love me."

She said instead: "I can't . . ." and lifted herself out of his arms to crouch, sullen and tense, against her pillows.

"What? No?" His voice was drawling and amused, but at her silence, it roughened, "Diana, what's the matter with you? Can't you speak?"

"I must. I'd give all I own not to, but I must. There's something I want to tell you . . . ask you. Go and put on your dressing-gown. You'll catch cold, like that."

The time it took him to get it, steadied her. He came back wrapped in a dark soft garment and sat down at the end of her bed, his shoulders braced defensively against the foot-post.

"What's all the shootin' fur?" he asked with an almost perfect imitation of his own easy manner. "Out with it, now."

"I must know . . ." But for a moment she could not speak. A horror of words crept over her like a cold shadow.

"Do say something, my dear," Bob said, imperiously, "I'm waiting to find what this is all about. Tell me."

She told him badly in awkward stumbling phrases. And he heard her through in a remote silence, but as she went on, she felt a stealthy anger rising in him. He sat, motionless, a vague bulk which seemed impenetrable and tenantless as if the spirit that inhabited it had withdrawn. At last he leaned toward her.

"What did you say this woman's name was?"

"Helene Kennedy."

"And where did you meet her?"

"She came here, to the house."

"I never heard of her. It's queer, isn't it? Black-mail, probably."

But it wasn't blackmail. Helene had not bargained; the tempest of her emotion had been too devastating. Her despair had swept them down with the force of a tidal wave. Diana had, still, the feeling of being whirled and bruised in rolling surf.

"She was wearing the violets you sent her."

Bob laughed softly.

"My dear girl, any woman may wear violets. Is that all you have against me?" He moved closer, smiling, "Do we have to talk about this now?"

With a quick movement she sat up, huddling her knees in her arms.

"We have to talk about it now. Yes. Turn on the light."

Bob switched on the light with angry fingers. Diana reached forward and caught her negligee about her

shoulders. Her eyes were steely. They faced each other, tense as animals about to spring.

"You never heard of Helene Kennedy."

"No."

"You didn't see her, today. You weren't . . . driving with her, last night."

"No."

"You haven't taken her . . . hither and yon . . . these last eight years."

"Hell! No."

"I can't believe you."

She stopped short with a hoarse breath like a sob. She looked at him, confronting a different man than she had ever seen, a stubborn, imperturbable man to whom she meant less than she had thought; and she was conscious of a wish to protect him from his own denials. But she was consumed too with a vast impatience. She wanted to get the truth; given truth, they could build fair from it, somehow.

"I'd give the world to believe you," she said slowly, "but I can't . . . yet." The wish grew in her to shatter his imperturbability. "Will you go down with me to the hotel, tomorrow morning and talk with Mrs. Kennedy?"

He said smoothly: "I shan't even answer your questions. They're insulting. This is absurd, Diana, all of it."

Diana closed her eyes. It came to her that the attempt to be honest was futile; they could neither of them be truthful in this situation. "One can keep trying," she told herself but she was not convinced. Things were so bad that Bob might as well lie as not. He had known from the first that he was playing against long odds and calculated them; but for Helene's betrayals, she would never have known. . . .

She had a dry dread of more denials. More than the thing done, his flat disavowals of it hurt her; his easy resolution to leave them, unexplained, between them, she could neither understand nor condone. Her pride whipped her into composure and she said quietly:

"I'm only trying to get at the truth, Bob."

"But you've decided what the truth is. You've convinced yourself. It is incredible what you've created out of suspicion."

"Not merely suspicion. This woman told me . . . Mrs. Kennedy said . . ."

"Stop," he said in a hard voice, "I won't listen to what she said. Think what you like of me." He meant to pose as a wronged man, the victim of a nagging woman. His face was pale, with a grim, compressed mouth. Diana studied it with a desperate intensity as if she must learn it by heart before it was lost to her; and they were slipping apart. The distance between them was widening. . . .

"I can't reach you," she said.

"Not this way. Not in a thousand years. What are you accusing me of?"

The fretted string of her endurance broke.

"Infidelity. Lies," she cried unsteadily. "Of keeping a mistress for eight years, while you lived with me."

"But you can't prove that." He was cold and contemptuous. "You have built the whole thing on suspicion without a shadow of proof. And, these eight years, you've had everything I could give you. Don't overlook that. This house is yours and all that is in it. I've tried, God knows, to make up to you the things I couldn't give you in the beginning. . . ."

"Those things don't matter," she faltered. "Oh, it's useless to talk, like this. I've lived too close to you, all these years . . . we've shared too much . . ."

life . . . and if we can't be frank, now, we'll have nothing. It's the future we have to consider. . . ."

"The future," he echoed in a muffled voice. He waited a moment, frowning, "What is it you intend to do . . . in the future?"

"I . . . don't know." She leaned forward, her cheeks flaming. "Everything has changed. Life's changed . . . and you. I'm changed. . . ." She fought doggedly to make her words distinct. "Changed. I'm lead, all through. A divorce can be managed, perhaps; a separation."

"You can't divorce me, Diana," he said curtly, "You have no proof. You may be quite willing to swear away marriage and put me in a pillory before the town, but a court wants proof. There's not a scrap in existence: not a letter, not a check. All that you have is the word of a wildly hysterical woman; and she would deny tomorrow all she told you. If I confronted her, she'd declare she never said it."

"For one who never heard her name, you seem very sure what Helene Kennedy would do."

"It's useless to repeat that I don't know her. But I'll fight a divorce, Diana, to the last ditch. You can't divorce me."

"There's such a thing as invisible divorce," she flung at him, "I'll not share my husband's love with another woman . . . other women. I can do . . . what I like . . . with myself."

He got to his feet and looked down at her with wide-open, angry eyes.

"I won't bother you with my love-making," he said disdainfully.

Diana made a great effort to control her voice.

"This isn't just jealousy . . . or anger. I've known both, since afternoon, since Mrs. Kennedy was here

. . . but they're gone. I wanted to strip us of pretense . . . of anything that veiled the truth, however disastrous that truth was. I thought the truth would . . . help us. I wanted to give you a hearing. Kent said . . . Kent called it a decent gesture."

A menacing little silence followed the halt in her voice.

"Have you been talking me over with Kent Amlie?"

"Are you mad, Bob? We were talking . . . about a book."

"When?"

"I was over at Kent's house, tonight."

He laughed. "Taking your wrongs to another man. And you come back here and make this infernal racket about my infidelity. As if all the physical indecencies you've conjectured weighed against a spiritual disloyalty like that."

She cried out. "Bob . . . *Bob* . . ."

"I'll not forgive you, very soon, for that," he said.

She slipped down on her pillow with a gesture of despair. The advantage was with him, with that hard strain of brutality that slept under his easy charm; and she, too, was hard. Her voice sounded dazed.

"It's no use. I can't do any more. I wish you'd go."

She watched him turn away. He moved uncertainly toward his own room and she heard him fumbling at the door. Then it closed, heavily and with a smooth click, the key turned in the lock.

V

I N V I S I B L E divorce.

The words hung in Diana's mind. Night after night, she flung herself into bed with a sick weariness, a sick longing for the oblivion of sleep; and oblivion would not come. She tossed and twisted, dozing in short stretches with murky dreams churning in her mind or rousing to a restlessness in which everything was confused and the minutes crept sluggishly into hours. In the end, thoughts and dreams alike would break and tangle, leaving her gazing, wide-eyed, at the closed door between her room and Robert's. In the dark, it was dim and shadowy, too impalpable for a solid door set in the wall of a house. It dipped and changed. It became a blank chasm, dusky and silent and impassable.

The first flame of her anger had burned itself out and nothing kindled it afresh. But anger had been the mere curl of flame at the edge of a wretchedness that went on dully, deep underneath the apathy of her mind and spirit.

At times that cold wretchedness became a challenge, and she would sit up, her arms about her knees, turning over the past, asking herself bitterly where she had failed. How could young Diana Wayne have built happiness securely with the materials she had? She brought them out and put them before her. Bob. Chris. The *Anchorage Journal*. The paper, at least, was real. It was the life she had shared with her husband, her passion for it part of the rapturous passion she had felt

for him, woven with it in one pattern; and to that life, lived in a stained, shabby building at the center of Anchorage, she had put everything second, even Chris. She had always suffered from an irking sense that she gave Chris too little, reckoning among her losses certain lovely things that could never be regained. No price which she could pay would bring them back to her. They were quite gone. The fat baby Chris was gone and the little boy. . . . It was useless to keep thinking of Chris.

It was her husband she was considering. Had she given him too little? The feeling that she had thrust her back into a consuming impatience. She did not believe she could have done differently. She had blundered and come to disaster but there was no time in those years when she would not, quite simply, have given her life for Robert's. God help me, I did the best I could, didn't I? . . . she thought, lifting her head to look at his closed door. "I am your wife. . . . I've been yours utterly." But the words did not help her. They had no accusatory value. Diana felt that it was not Robert who was to blame. They had been caught in the swift rush of forces stronger than either of them. Love had been their banner over them and it was gone; and from the man, first, a long time ago.

Invisible divorce. Nothing was more improbable than an open rupture. Robert would never consent to that. He prided himself too much on his conventionality, his sound judgment, and, besides, he was given to habits. In the most trivial matters he fell quickly into repetitions, being more comfortable in a jog-trot routine. He possessed the habit of her as his wife, the confirmed marital habits of a shared house, mutual friends, interest in Chris; he had, as well, . . . (Diana stretched her arms and laughed uncertainly). . . .

made a habit of Helene Kennedy who dissipated his secret dissatisfactions. But even for Helene, Robert had not broken down the barriers. He would discard a passion which demanded recognition, which could not be fitted into some secret corner of his orderly existence. No . . . they would not separate. They would keep up all the exterior companionship of marriage, Diana thought, having their house, their shared prosperity, their circle of acquaintances, their son. If Robert went to Washington, she would go with him, preserving the amenities. They would travel together sometimes and sometimes stay at home together and poke the fire. . . .

Marriage had given them an intimacy from which not even estrangement could free them. Even now, if she rapped on his locked door, Robert would open it, she did not doubt. He might not want to have her with him, but he would pretend he wanted her; for he was both courteous and considerate and his courtesy and consideration would make easy the perfunctory gestures of a reconciliation. Once Diana almost went to him but she got no further than the edge of her bed where she sat rocking back and forth, stabbed through with the certainty that she could not endure the emptiness of pretending.

How did other women endure that pretense? She was, after all, walking a common way of womankind and one that had none of the dignity of a Via Dolorosa though it was dolorous enough, Diana thought. So many women had pressed their feet into this muddy road: cautious women who chose safety and held free of ecstasy and agony alike; cynical cold women who accepted infidelities casually; competent women, going on steadily because they felt it was their duty; bitter

women who fought for the rights of their children and their own rights, in secret, behind the ramparts of a quiet house.

But she was none of these. The thing she had to face was not a man's unfaithfulness nor his denials of it, but a change, primarily, in herself. Her own love failed her. She had thought love was everlasting and as strong as death; and yet in the shame of this disillusionment, it had proved brief, fragile. It was as fragile as a crystal vase which was sheathed to withstand the hardest blows from without but shattered at a touch from within.

If she had loved him enough, if this had happened in their first years, she would by now have gone to Robert generously, and healed the breach. The barrier between them was not that locked door but the invisible gulf of their indifference. She had simply . . . it was a fact influenced by no act of her will . . . stopped loving him. The change had come in a moment when her whole being was rebellious with the desire for frankness and understanding. She had attached a fantastic importance to the truth and when it failed her, she had, queerly, lost her husband; but she was lost, too, within herself. She longed to be what she had been, untortured by this dreadful indifference, to return to a state of mind, a time that was gone: the most useless of desires. Beyond it, nothing remained. . . .

Nothing, that is, but her cynical disbelief in herself. Helene Kennedy's revelation had destroyed Diana's confidence and the doubt of her own worth tinged all her thoughts. She carried with her a clear sense of being undesired, unlovable. In it, she recognized a sensitiveness like Kent Amlie's. She too, was crippled, somehow; and in time, she felt, her own attitude toward life

would, like his, shape itself in recognition of that fundamental circumstance.

Between her sleepless nights, the days went on. Their ordinary life had no discernible break. Robert showed some strain of the unhappiness through which they were passing and, characteristically, took himself away from it. He was gone a great deal, arranging the preliminaries of his campaign, in conferences with Cretcher and Boyd Despard, absenting himself, Diana suspected, far oftener than was necessary; but his absence, his absorption in his own interests made adjustment easier . . . and the more so for Robert who had no time for introspection than for Diana who had far too much.

Presently that unwonted separation of their lives became habitual; and though they were suffering, they could not admit it. There was no logic in them, only the knowledge that they were indifferent to each other. They denied the existence of indifference and hostility, yet they were there. They were courteous and tolerant and gentle and entirely remote. They told each other witty stories and laughed over them and the gulf between them widened and widened.

In her own living, Diana was conscious of a pervasive lethargy. She turned on the ebb-tide of her self-confidence to her own kind, to women. She had never known women well, for the circumstances of her life had thrown her with men, but she expected to find them charming and satisfying; and she expected that domesticity . . . once she got down to it . . . and social interests would fill the days as reporting had filled them, a good measure, pressed down and shaken together and running over. And she discovered that most of what went into the measure was flimsy stuff, chaff, not wheat.

A few grains could be sifted and garnered. Among

her women friends, she found material for the chit-chat stuff which spread blandly across the Society Page of the new Sunday edition; and the hour she spent writing it at the plant, had a strange, pleasant peace. She touched peace nowhere else; she could summon no resources to combat the restlessness within her. She forced herself to a detailed ordering of her house. She shopped. She went to clubs, to musicales and lectures and concerts, and she sat through interminable bridge games behind a deceptive smile. But she could think of no reason for pursuing these diverse interests. What did it matter who won a prize or who was invited to a party? Why should they listen, a mass of perfumed femininity, to some sleek propagandist who advised them on world affairs with his tongue in his cheek? What was the use of any of it?

October abroad held a faint haze on the horizon and warmth in the earth. The trees slowly turned tawny and gold; the leaves had not yet begun to fall but clung to their branches, fluttering in odorous winds. Diana went out, one morning, to plant tulip bulbs in the flower-border. Bareheaded, the sleeves of her jersey frock rolled up, she knelt on the crisp grass, smelling the earth, feeling the sunlight, listening to the fluting song of the blackbirds in the maples. Her attention fixed on these elemental things and liberated her from thinking. She planted industriously, so many bulbs, so many inches apart, each at a measured depth. Then, behind her, she heard Peniel's voice, speaking her name.

He had been walking from town. He came along the flagstone path, his thin shoulders squared, his spare legs moving with neat precision, holding his umbrella carefully with the ferule off the ground to save wear. As he came closer, Diana saw that his face was troubled

with pinched furrows running down from his nostrils on either side of his small mustache.

"Diana. . . ." He spoke her name in a puzzled voice and waited for her to ask him what the matter was before he went on. Diana asked him gently.

"Something's happened, Father Wayne. What is it?"

"B-Bob and K-Kent have quarreled, Diana. Kent has resigned. They've b-broken up their p-partnership."

Diana felt her heart stand still. "Quarreled," she repeated, "Who told you?"

"I heard them. I went up to Bob's office, this forenoon . . . as I do, often, you know, p-puttering around . . . and they were in Kent's room across the hall. Giles was listening at the d-door."

She stood up, gazing at Peniel, her face stern.

"The whole p-plant was listening," he explained, "G-going up the stairs I remember thinking the city room had never been so quiet b-before. T-t-tense."

"Why should they quarrel?" She stood, looking beyond him, and her voice while it was calm was somber. It was as if she asked herself the question, arrested by its strangeness. "How could they . . . after all these years?"

Peniel took off his hat and smoothed his hair with his hand. "I really don't know, Diana. Bob came in while I was waiting and said K-Kent had resigned. 'Kent's going,' he said, 'He offered it to me to buy or sell and I'm going to buy.' Kent's interest, he meant, in the p-paper. It seems a p-pity, doesn't it, Diana? It seems a pity that anything should come between those boys."

"Kent resign . . . but that's impossible. Kent is the *Journal* . . . in ways Bob isn't at all. They round out each other. Why should they quarrel?"

"Such a p-pity," It was their anger that distressed him, not its cause. There was something innocent and cozy in Peniel's attitude toward living. "I wish you'd go down there and see them, Diana. I really do. I've a feeling Bob would listen to you."

"I wonder," Diana said softly.

To this, after a moment's silence, Peniel only suggested in an uncertain voice, "Perhaps he wouldn't listen. I don't know. Perhaps there is nothing to be d-done. But you are so very close to Bob, closer than most wives to their husbands. I've the feeling he might listen, Diana. And it would certainly c-comfort him to have you."

"I'll go. Yes; I must go," Diana murmured.

But, standing there, pulling out the fingers of her earth-stained gloves, she knew how difficult going to them would be and she longed to put her head down on Peniel's slight shoulder and tell him that neither of them, Bob nor Kent, needed comforting as she herself did.

* * *

■

Diana dressed slowly, with great care. She was going to a musicale that afternoon and she meant to stop at Robert's office on her way across the town. She had time, now, for a finished grooming that had never been hers in the days when she was too rushed to think much about her clothes, when she wore cheap frocks that did not suit her, scuffed shoes, hats that were always sliding uncertainly on one side of her pompadour; and Robert Wayne adored her. But she was not thinking of that. Her mind held a jumble of phrases: "And Esther put on her royal apparel and went into the inner court of the king's house. . . . So Esther arose and stood be-

fore the king and said, If it please the king, let it be written . . . for how shall I endure to see the evil that shall come to my people?"

They were her people, Bob, and Kent with his quick, irritable tempers, and Chris. For Chris was concerned in all that occurred. Their lives, their past and Chris's future, were bound together. How could she endure to see evil come to any of them?

It was astonishing how much she thought about Chris. Her feeling for him had grown sharper, coming to her slowly out of the discovery of him as an entity separate from his father, filling a void. She found something of herself in him, in all he did, translated into masculine terms. Chris was as strong and vigorous as a young tree. She loved the resilience of his long body, his shining eyes set arrestingly in his sensitive brown face, his quick impulses. She would have Chris beside her while she was growing old, and suddenly she found herself looking forward to his manhood which stretched before her in the long years ahead. The *Anchorage Journal* was his heritage. It was for Chris that it must go on.

When she was ready, she stood before the glass and looked at herself attentively. She had put on a coffee-colored suit, rigidly simple, with a small hat and a narrow skin of sable. In the shadow of her hat-brim her eyes looked black; and the dark fur gave her skin a transparent warmth. She paid herself the tribute of a curt chuckle and, as she went down the stairs, a spicy elation ran in her blood.

She drove straight to the *Journal* building. Stopping at the curb she saw Giles come down the steps from the lobby to the sidewalk. He stared at her reflectively for a second and then came quickly to the door of her car.

"What are you doing here, Di?" he asked, "You'd better be at home. I'm not joking; really. You haven't the slightest suspicion what's going on in the town. Have you? Have you read the *Clarion*, today?"

Diana shook her head. "I'll wait for the *Journal*."

"Your loyalty does you credit; but you'll find nothing in it of this. The *Journal* is too conservative for surmises and rumors and there's nothing else yet."

"D'you mean these silly rumors of race-feeling? I heard someone talking yesterday at Virginia Sneed's tea. Is there a story going to break, today, Giles?"

"I don't know when it will break, but there's a stir everywhere, under the surface; They've called off the fight between Bantam Phil and the nigger lightweight, Chicago Sam, that was to have been held at Burk's Gardens tonight. Kent took my yarn on that because it was news. He refuses to call the rest I tell him, news. He simply shuts his eyes to it."

"To what, Giles?"

But Giles, suddenly, did not want to talk and gave her a reluctant answer. He suggested flagrant indecencies which could not be put into words and Diana had the impression that some man had become too loathsome to be recognized by other men. "He's not been caught napping, yet," he said, "but he will be. He's not clever."

"Is he someone we know?" she asked gropingly and when he did not answer she stared at him with growing anxiety, "Giles . . . has this anything to do with the quarrel between Bob and Kent?"

He took his cigarette case from his pocket and opened it, making a pause.

"Where did you hear about that?" he asked civilly, "Bob wasn't home for lunch."

"No. Father Wayne was down, this forenoon."

"Oh . . . he was?"

"He saw you," Diana observed pointedly, "listening at the door."

Giles shrugged his shoulders. "It wasn't I who told Peniel Wayne."

"Robert told him. That Kent was leaving."

"So I understand. Well . . . you know Kent. He quarrels, first and last, with everyone."

"He has never quarreled with Bob. There's something dreadfully wrong." She gripped her fingers nervously on the wheel. "Oh, Kent mustn't go. What would Bob do without him? The strength of the paper has been in the fact that they supplemented each other. You came in too late to see it like that, Giles. The *Journal* can never mean to you what it does to us. It's merely a business enterprise to you, not a thing born of your flesh and spirit. It isn't right for Kent to leave it."

"No man," Giles remarked amiably, "is indispensable. Were you thinking of making that pretty speech to Bob, Di? I wouldn't. Why do you mix in this, at all? They're neither of them asking advice from a woman and it's cursed impertinent to offer it. Not to say undignified."

"Pouf!" cried Diana, "My dignity doesn't bother me. Giles, you idiot, you have no conception, none in the world, of the friendship we three have had. Of course, I'm going to them. It may do no good, but they'll listen, they'll talk to me. There's nothing we can't talk about. . . ."

Giles's eyes glittered like a squirrel's. And Diana heard her own voice falling, far away, it seemed, while beneath Giles's eyes her thoughts raced swiftly. She recalled a September breakfast table and Robert looking up warily, smoothing over the silly situation that

Giles and Peniel had created about the keys. Giles's eyes had glittered, then. She felt that he knew all she did, that he had known when she was ignorant. She looked back at him, pretending not to see his expression and found the voice to say:

"You spoke of the *Clarion*. Is that the trouble, Giles? Is this merger the thing that has set them at odds?"

"I don't know, I'm sure."

"The merger is worthless if Kent is lost to us. However much Bob wants the deal to go through, I'm sure he'd think that. He'd not sacrifice Kent to it."

Giles spent a moment gazing at her.

"You're letting your imagination run wild," he said, at last, drily. "You can take my word Raedel wasn't at the bottom of this quarrel. Kent said bitter things, but the merger was never mentioned. It'll go through as smoothly as one drop of quicksilver rolls into another."

"You know so surprisingly much, Giles."

"No. Really."

He spoke with an astonished sincerity, turning his eyes upon her. And something cracked their candor like a flame. Diana had the impression that he was angry, and with her for her insistence that Kent Amlie was necessary to Robert.

He said, slowly: "You've this odd prejudice against Kurt Raedel. He's the most vital personality in Anchorage. He sees a lot deeper into life than most men."

Diana's eyes grew cold.

"Does he? Or is it that he lives in a deeper world, a dark world where evil crawls about? I know he's seen dreadful things because he told me some of them. He's . . . warped. He's clever and brilliant and dangerous. His limitations make him dangerous to us all. Ah . . .

laugh if you like, but it's true. You know what Kent said about him."

"I don't."

"I can't remember the words, but the idea was that the man's mind was soiled. He finds filth in everything whether it's there or not. It's ingrained . . . not a frothy cynicism like yours."

"'Frothy cynicism' is good," observed Giles, "Is it your very own, sweet? Or Kent's?"

"I don't like him." The detachment of Diana's tone matched his. "I have the same feeling about him. I . . . he . . . something happened . . ."

Giles laughed softly.

"Did he make a pass at you, my dear? How innocent you are. Yes . . . beautifully innocent and chaste: that is what one feels . . . and somewhat out of date. Kurt not only admires you enormously but he seems to have made some shrewd surmises about you. Perhaps his suspicions were roused by your disdain . . . you were disdainful, weren't you, Lady Guinevere?"

"Guinevere?"

"Wasn't it Guinevere who epitomized disdain? Or . . . what?" It was evident that his query diverted him. Everything about him told Diana that, his sleek head poised mockingly and his eyes on hers in droll meditation as if he were looking at her more carefully than he had ever looked before. "Have I made a shocking faux pas? Sorry. I'm rusty on medieval metaphor. I've done you an injustice, perhaps, taking you so for granted. After all, you're very clever, Diana."

Diana thought that cleverness, as he defined it, was no compliment. Giles, himself, was clever. He evaded her comprehension, so that she seemed to grope after him as for someone in a fog, disquieted and baffled; and he eluded her, leading her on like a will-o'-the-wisp, to

the place where what they said was hollow without sincerity or meaning.

She lifted her head to speak to him and her eyes swept the empty walk. Giles was half a block away. . . .

In the pale lobby, Diana stood still, looking at the bobbed heads bent over the desks in the want-ad section, the antennæ of her mind feeling for any possible tension; but it was all ordinary. The clerks were in the afternoon rush when, with the paper gone to press, they speeded up the tabulations of the day's business. They had no time to remark her presence. The cashier looked up from behind his brass grill and nodded, and a reporter stopped to mention hastily that the day was pleasant. She mounted the stairs, swiftly stopping in the upper corridor again, to listen. The familiar clicking came from the Associated Press room at the end of the hall. Robert's office was empty. She could hear voices, muffled and indistinct, in Kent's and the door was ajar. She pushed it open and entered.

The two men stood together beside a high window; and as Diana closed the door behind her, they looked up rather blankly. The sunlight falling through the window, lay unsparingly on their faces. Besides the painful gravity of Kent's Robert's face seemed more than ever closed and invulnerable. Still and silent, they stood side by side with a bearing that conveyed at the same time, understanding and constraint; as if they were silent because, already, they had nothing more to say.

About them, the room had a strange disorder. Kent's desk, the long table, were curiously tidy, the shelves between the windows were half-empty and books were stacked on the floor beside two packing-cases. The storm of their quarrel had swept the place clear.

Kent was the first to turn, and embarrassing as he might find her coming, a faint smile gathered in his eyes. "Well, Diana," he said quizzically, "so you have come." Then he pushed the papers he held into Robert's hands and sank down into the swivel chair before his desk.

Diana did not smile back. "I had to come," she murmured.

"Who told you?" asked Kent.

"Father Wayne, and afterward I saw Giles." It would not be difficult to talk with them. They were obviously ill-at-ease from the compulsion of repressing what engrossed their thoughts. "I wanted to hear the straight of the thing from you."

A shadow crossed Robert's face. Still, he moved toward her and sat down opposite, looking at her.

"This is unnecessary, Diana." That was the word he found and repeated. "Unnecessary. I'm sorry Father went to you, and Giles knew nothing, one way or another."

She did not tell him Giles had listened at the door. "Does it seem strange to you to have me here?" she asked, a little wistfully. "But I couldn't endure to have a break between us. It would have been unbearable. We've been too close."

There was a little silence. In Robert's gaze, bent upon her, she was aware of a fixed contemplation. His arm lay along the table beside him. He looked at her steadily, watching her face, absorbed with watching.

Kent said quietly: "I'm going to stay on, Diana. We've settled that."

"Oh, I'm glad. The paper couldn't have been the same without you. . . ."

But her gladness did not exorcise the poison in her

blood. Under everything, she felt a change in them and a clogging weight lay on her heart.

"Kent stays," said Robert. He spoke heavily but willingly, too, as though he wanted to lend a hand. "The time is the most inopportune one can well imagine for a break. There are too many irons in the fire, just now, and taking in new blood is an experiment. Kent sees that he's needed to keep the balance."

He did not say, Diana thought, that Kent was staying because their quarrel was forgotten. He had not agreed that a break was unendurable. She had the sense that it was Robert who had made the gesture of reconciliation; and because it was expedient, practicable. That he was hiding something was manifest from the elaboration with which he advanced to meet the occasion while Kent, his hands clasped about one knee, merely swung his chair toward the window and fixed his eyes on the square of blue sky beyond it.

"There's no use raking over the details," Robert said and stopped to think, to consider what he was going to say; and what he said, at last, was simple. "You can't analyze a quarrel that flares up in a moment. One says things one doesn't mean, carried on from one thing to another. It was like that, with us, today. We both said things . . . but nothing that can't be put aside for the sake of the paper." He looked up frankly, "That is the fundamental fact in our lives. Nothing else measures up to it."

"Nothing," Kent agreed.

Of the three, he was the most moved. Whatever it was that had happened, had gone deep with Kent. Diana saw him hurt, exhausted, but stoical, carrying his tranquillity like a shield on his arm. Only in his voice was a note of pain as if the bitter things which

had been said, pulsed in him like the throbbing of a wound.

She could think of nothing to say, not one word. Once she would have asked them to tell her all of it, pressing against the sharpest realization. But her pervasive apathy stole through her like a cool fog. There were things which they must hide from each other if they were to go on. This quarrel, like her own shameful hour with Kurt Raedel and the truth which Helene had bared, must be pushed down into the limbo of discarded memories. It was over; not forgotten, but over. They had shut the door upon it and would not let her see beyond the door. "This is middle-age," she thought. And they were all growing up to it, together. They would grow older with that accumulation of unsaid things in hiding, falling back for safety on the casual contacts of daily routine. She and Bob were doing that, already. Her eyes traveled about the room, taking in its disorder and Kent's dark troubled face. She sat up, suddenly.

"I wish I could come back to the *Journal*."

Robert got to his feet, shoving his hands into his pockets with a gesture of impatience. From the window, he faced about, looking at her coolly.

"You're not happy at home, then, Diana," he said with the slightest flavor of irony.

There was no irony in her reply. "Not so very happy, Bob. Time has always been filled to the brim for me and I can't fill it matching samples for draperies and fiddling afternoons, with bits of painted pasteboard. I can't."

"You've not given it too long a trial."

"Long enough. I'm cursed, if you like. I feel as if I'd been lost out of Eden."

"Having eaten the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge?"

A faint smile twisted Diana's mouth. "That is very penetrating of you, Bob. Say that I'm lost, groping in a void. That's what it seems to me."

Kent said crisply: "We could use you. Miss Barron is making a mess of the Society news and knowing it in her heart, she's going to be married before long. We'd intended getting a woman from Chicago, but the job's yours, Diana, if you want it. You'll have a hell of a lot to do. I wish we could say we wouldn't work you hard, but there seem to be no in-between speeds in our business. And the Sunday edition isn't what we want it. . . ."

He lapsed into one of his thoughtful pauses considering the Sunday edition and Diana turned to Robert. Robert was silent, gazing down on the area where the vans were backed against the curb.

He said: "You're a part-owner, Diana. You have the right to come back, if you like."

A painful thought stabbed through her mind, "But you'd rather I wouldn't. You don't want me here."

"Frankly, I don't." His eyes studied her, "I don't want you here, Diana. Wiser not. Things are changed. They're not what they were."

"Changed . . . because you've learned something you haven't known before?" asked Kent, "Who was it said that life is a stealthy leopard lapping up the blood of our illusions?"

The bitterness in his voice stung Diana and she pulled back, realizing that they were betraying themselves. What she meant, what they all meant, was that the old delight was gone; they wished they could turn back the years, that they could know again the

first tumultuous adventuring through a hard world. Useless wishing. It was time they talked about something else.

"What's stirring in the town?" she asked lightly, "Giles said something about trouble brewing. If a story is breaking why do we let the *Clarion* scoop it?"

"If a story were really breaking, we'd print it," said Bob, "but we can't deal in veiled innuendo and gossip. Raedel has been running some articles that just miss being slander, that's all. My idea is that he's pouring out his last vial of vitriol, while he can."

"Here's today's broadside." Kent brought the paper to Diana, spreading it on the table before her, "It reads like the Lamentations of Jeremiah. They say Sybinski does the writing, but I think 'Orgies of Babylonian Licentiousness' is from Raedel's vocabulary. It's Jamie Morgan he's calling licentious."

The vision of a dusky girl, gliding back into a shadowy hall, came to Diana.

"You don't mean Candace Marshall? 'Orgies of Owen Morgan's house?' Pouf!"

"We've had young Dorsett poking about; and he's unearthed a few facts the *Clarion* hasn't troubled about. We think Owen's house is being watched, secretly; but Jamie isn't there. Owen put him on the train for Chicago, at three o'clock yesterday morning; and the Marshalls took Candace away the afternoon before. They were wise. Kurt Raedel has not discovered yet that they're gone."

Drawing on her gloves, Diana felt the excitement she always had on the track of a story, and on the heels of it a steadying disbelief in this one. "I wish I knew the real truth of it, the yarn that's back of this. Will you be at home for dinner, tonight, Bob?"

He opened the door for her, "I'm sorry." His

slight formality stressed his regret. "I thought I'd told you. Did you want me at home? Have we some engagement?"

She shook her head. She did not want him. She seemed to herself to speak from within a thin shell of reserve which nothing could pierce.

"Chris will be there. I'll have a drive with Chris. . . ."

* * *

■

Chris drove a car with an unconcerned mastery, suggesting recklessness. He had grown up in a knowledge, hardly conscious, of carburetors and transmissions, was already a competent mechanic, and cherished the suppressed desire to find himself alone, sometime, in the cockpit of an airplane. The sense of him beside her in the gloom of the car, gave Diana an obscure satisfaction. She relaxed contentedly against the cushioned seat, her eyes on his face.

They were closer, she told herself, than most mothers and sons. But that was because Chris was like her. Even when he was turbulent or sulky, she could understand why; in the same situation she would have been what he was. His most hare-brained exploits gave her a secret pleasure, under her fears; his mirth, the wanton daring of his babyhood, had tempered her disapproval.

Diana went back, slipping from one memory of Chris to another. There was a fat two-year-old jigging gaily in the noon sunlight at the edge of a Mansard roof and a young Diana Wayne mounting the long ladder toward him with every breath a stabbing pain. Criminal of carpenters to leave that ladder when they went to lunch. Would he fall before she could reach

him? "But I'm going to punish you, Chris. For leaving our yard. You disobeyed when you went out of the yard." "Vewy well, Muv'." The corners of his mouth turned up and he smiled through his lashes, "On'y not jus' now . . . not jus' when I been waitin' for you to come home."

There was Diana Wayne, penned in a corner at the funeral of a mayor, her eyes fixed on a curious stir about the stately plumed hearse at the curb. With a premonition of shamed dismay she watched the coffin set down on the curb and two pall-bearers disappearing head foremost . . . torsos prone and stout legs rampant . . . into the hearse's depths, to emerge a moment later gripping a small boy in blue shorts who was chuckling hilariously . . .

A smudged Chris, swinging a huge gray cat by the tail. Circles soared and dipped while he spun on his heel and the cat screamed. His expression was a funny mixture of delight and cruelty and mischievous apprehension. . . .

But the summer before Diana had watched him dive from a high rock for a tiny girl who had fallen into treacherous water. She had been standing at the foot of the bluff with someone who clutched her arm and she looked up to see Chris run along the edge of rock beyond her. He poised above the dazzle of brilliant blue and his body flashed in a clear arc to the water. Afterward, he brought the child to its mother. He came over the grass in long strides, carrying the little girl in his arms, her head nestled in the hollow of his wet shoulder; and his face wore openly a queer, startled tenderness, a brooding look such as old masters painted on the face of St. Joseph. . . .

Chris broke a comfortable silence.

"We're comin' into Blair. How's that for time? A motor hums, frosty nights."

"We ought to turn back from there. We started so late it will be midnight now, when we get home."

As late as that she could go straight to her room, without seeing Robert, without having to talk. Another day would be over.

"I gotto get to bed early, next two nights. We're playin' Blair, Sat'day. You comin' up, Moth'?"

"I don't know anything, now, to prevent. Can you think of anyone who'd ride with me? I might as well fill up the car."

"There's Angie Bush. Most of the fellows are hiking it, countin' on lifts from trucks, and not many girls are goin'. But she is, she told me."

"Chris. I'm not fond of Angie. Do you see much of her?"

"Nope. She's in most of my classes . . . all my classes, I guess." He paused to reflect. "Yessir, she sits across the aisle in every one."

"I don't know what she went back to high school for. She is such an empty-headed little fool. She's not like Sue. She bullies Sue, but the woman has put up with so much that she doesn't quite take in how pert Angie is, nor how shoddy and unwholesome she seems to other people. Is she popular at school?"

"Why . . . I guess so. She's got a cute line . . ."

"Has she? Cross the river at Blair . . . why don't you? . . . and go home on the east road."

Chris slowed as he ran through a sedate town. The river, beneath the bridge, was bordered by a steely glimmer of tracks and clustered switch lights scattered fire-opal flakes on the black water. They left the pavement and turned south on a gravel road, flowing over

low hills. The wind had a smoky tang and the fields were a sweeping stubble with the corn shocked. The farmhouses were far apart, the road more lonely. Chris, his tongue loosened, fell into one of his occasional moods when he poured out his accumulated confidences, and Diana listened with transported attention. Within the car, the murmur of his voice had deep shifting cadences as if he were strumming on a bass-viol. Outside the stillness deepened. An occasional car passed them, but not often, not enough to mar the quiet. Sounds were all muffled and insinuating: the baying of a dog, far-off, the long faint echo of a locomotive whistle, miles away, across the river.

Not far from Anchorage Diana asked Chris to stop on the brow of a hill. The moon, climbing the sky, illuminated the whole countryside: the upland fields with wind rustling the stubble, the lazy river lying in somber shadows and silvering lights. On the slope below the headstones of an abandoned little cemetery lay scattered like forgotten baubles in the moonlight, and behind it a wooded gully twisted toward the river, the dark trees floating over its edge against an argent wash of sky. A dreadful raucous scream cut through the silence.

Diana flung open the door of the car and leaned out straining her ears. No other sound followed that inhuman cry . . . only stillness unbearably prolonged. She shivered and leaned back, her eyes riveted on Chris's face. Quiet seemed to have swallowed the world.

"It came from somewhere over there," he whispered, "I'm going down, Moth' . . . down the gully."

"No, Chris. Wait. Listen."

A stir broke the silence. It came to them vaguely, a weird muffled whisper on the wind, resolving itself

into a sinister repetition. A chill horror seemed to pour out of the crisp pure night and wrap them about. Chris sent the car forward, down the slope, into the shadow at its foot. He turned off the lights and they sat listening to the whisper of water in the rocky bottom and that other whisper, further off.

"You stay here, Moth'. I'm going on."

"Chris . . . don't . . ."

"Someone must. I'll be all right."

From the car she watched him run along the uneven ground into the ravine. Then she sprang out and followed him. Their feet rustled in the dry leaves. For several minutes they groped and hurried, stopping now and then, to listen. The eerie whisper had ceased.

"We've come the wrong way;" Diana laid her hand on his arm and they stood still under an oak, beyond which the gully narrowed to a cleft between the cemetery and the upland fields. "Let's go back toward the river." The sharp jerk of his arm warned her. "What is it?" she whispered.

"Look."

Her eyes caught movement in the shadows. A flicker of moonlight fell on a white figure, a shadow. Another passed and another, a dim procession moving out of the blackness silently. Their passing was a horror intensified by the unearthly beauty of the moonlit sky. They came on, noiselessly, swiftly, shambling up the further side of the ravine and melting into the haze of the gleaming night. In their secrecy and haste, their departure was a matter of moments, a flight ignominious and shameful.

Diana shivered again and her breath jerked with the leap of her heart. She had a suffocating longing to escape from the dark hollow. Now . . . before she knew what it held. Her body shook in the frosty air,

shrinking from an unnamed terror; and dread seized her at the thought of Chris. She wanted Chris spared the dreadful thing from which these men were fleeing. He was too young, too sunshiny for any sordid knowledge. Panic-stricken, she tried to call to the last of the ghostly figures, disappearing above the gully, but no sound came from her lips. The faint throb of motors, muffled, blurred, was thrown back from the rocky walls. Chris had begun to move away, throwing his flashlight under the trees. Diana turned and went behind him, swiftly.

"There's something here." Chris said suddenly with an undertone of emotion in his tense clear voice, "Moth' . . . go back. Don't come any further. Mother . . ."

Diana took the light out of his hand. Bending over she peered at a heap, crumpled on the ground, a woman lying face down with her arms thrown above her head. It was Candace Marshall.

She lay there, not moving, mercifully unconscious. Her eyes were closed and a heavy bandage was tied over her mouth. Diana touched the girl's shoulder and got blood on her hands. Blood trickled across the slim back, soaking into Diana's frock.

She laid the girl back gently and walked past Chris to the end of the gully. Slumped against a tree, between the rocks, was the body of Jamie Morgan. His face and one shoulder pressed against the trunk, about which his arms had been drawn and made fast by a rope knotted over a low limb. In a space of ten yards about him the ground was flailed to soft mud. His feet splayed out impotently and under a bloodstained shirt, cut to ribbons, his back was a pulp of bloody flesh.

Diana went to hold up his body while Chris climbed to the limb and cut the rope; but Jamie's limp bulk

was too heavy for her. His face dropped against her breast and his slack weight rolled out of her arms, slowly, into the welter of mud.

She stood very still while Chris picked up a coat flung aside on a heap of leaves. It was a new coat and Candace, too, wore new garments. They had been away together.

"You must bring the car as close as you can, Chris. We shall have to get them into the car, somehow. There isn't time to go for help. They may die." A savage anger flowed within her and she stopped to fight it back, "We'll carry Jamie first," she said.

It took a long time to carry the man's heavy body over the rough ground and get it into the back of the sedan. But Chris alone carried Candace, almost as easily as he had borne the tiny girl in his arms, up the bluff. Diana got in while he stood at the running-board with that slight, limp form in his arms. He lifted her in, huddled across Diana's lap and they set off, driving slowly, toward the town.

VI

DIANA and Owen Morgan faced each other across a barren room.

Downstairs the doors were locked and the shades drawn in the bay-window of the office. In this room they were pulled nearly to the sill and the grayness of a rainy morning crept in below them, lying on the dusky floor in pools of paler dusk. Owen sat in an oak rocker, hunched forward so that his bowed legs emerged grotesquely beneath the edge of his shabby coat, lax as a rag doll's. His flat, clay-colored face wore a look of bewilderment which had not left it since he had gone into the hospital room where Jamie lay.

"He must go," Owen said in a dry voice, "somewheres, far off. He's begging to go."

"He isn't able to be moved."

"I can't make out he could stay. There's naught a man can do but go, with the people against him. The note left in his shirt give him twenty-four hours to be gone from the town; that's all. Toward day, when he came to, he began begging to go. Screaming."

Diana flinched. "Candace isn't conscious, yet. The whips had mangled her breasts and there are bones broken. They'd . . . kicked her."

Owen did not answer. The minutes dragged and Diana lost herself in thought. . .

Ace had opened the door when she and Chris came home. His eyes were bleak and the skin of his face was gray, bearing token of his knowledge of the thing that

had happened in the ravine. Chris climbed the stairs and Diana said in a quiet voice:

"Let him sleep in the morning, Ace. I don't want him at school, today." She looked down at her blood-stained frock and tears came into her eyes. "This has been dreadful for Chris."

"White man's justice." His voice was hard, his ashen face expressionless. "I seen it befoh, in my time. Hit's no use tryin' t' find who done it. Skulken white-caps 'at flogs firs' and asks questions lateh . . . maybe."

"Who told you, Ace?"

"A call come foh Mr. Ennis from th' papeh, an hour back."

She took a step forward and putting a hand on his sleeve compelled him to lift his eyes.

"But you knew it before that. We're your friends, in this house, Ace. Tell me."

"My nephew come here, Jeff Marshall 'at's Candace' brotheh. He didn't darse go home. He'd went up to Blair in his Fo'd to meet them. They got off'n the train and phoned him from there."

"That they had been away together."

"No'm . . . they didn' go away togetheh. We sen' Candace out'n town a week back, oveh to some cousins of her maw's in Davenpo't. She was crazy oveh 'at boy. We tol' her no good could come f'um it, tol' her oveh and oveh. But she was plumb crazy foh him and she kep' sayin' 'at he needed her. I reckon she thought it was tony, havin' a white man. She ain't nineteen, Mis' Wayne, and she don' know nothin'. Nothin'. White folks spoiled her. They'd been a little trouble brewin' and her paw 'lowed it was betteh to get her out'n the town, oveh to her maw's cousins in Davenpo't; but she give 'em th' slip this mawnin'. They

telegraphed her maw, cal'latin' to save trouble. Maybe som' 'un got wind of hit f'um th' telegram. Maybe it was Morgan's call f'um Blair; 'r they was spyin' on Jeff. The posse was waitin' foh them."

"Out where we . . . ?"

"Yas'm . . . no'th o' town. They took 'em out'n th' cah and tol' Jeff t' git foh home, if he'd save his own skin. He couldn' saved 'em. Hit's no use, a boy like that, buckin' them white-caps; and Candace, she tol' him to git gone and bring help. He didn' darse go home, so he come heah, to me. But when we got back, they'd gone." His head was upflung and raw feeling sprang up in his voice. "Candace was a hones' girl. W'en they took her, she slipped young Jeff her mai'-age lines foh her maw to see."

Diana scanned his face with stern, startled eyes.

"Were they . . . married, Ace?"

He nodded. "In Chicawgo, this mawnin', by the lines. Yas'm."

She stood still, staring at him as though she did not see him at all nor hear what he said. An instinctive loathing crept over her not to be repelled by her reason or her sympathy. She looked down dizzily as he went across the hall. And leaning against the newel-post, she wept and wept. . . .

But this was the thing that Owen Morgan must know. When she had met him at the hospital that morning, Diana offered, impulsively, to drive him home. She wanted to protect him, to keep the truth from him, until he was hidden in his own house. "Someone must tell him what his son has done," she thought, and turned to the consciousness of Owen before her, in the oak rocker.

"Jamie mustn't go," she said gently. "They can keep him safe from . . . from violence there at the hos-

pital. There's something you ought to know. I must tell you. . . ."

"You can save your words, Mis' Wayne. I know it. I know he married her."

"He mustn't leave her here. Until Candace takes a turn one way or another. . . ."

He fixed on her eyes, raw-rimmed from the fire within him.

"He doesn't care what happens to Candace, now. He's begging only to go. Why do you look like that? It's better he should go . . . anywhere, far off. Better all ways. He's a yellow cur." He spoke savagely, biting his jerking lips; and made her a bitter speech about his son.

"I wish I could see him in his coffin. Yes . . . dead. Him, not caring what happens to his wife. Marrying is naught against the law. Some states, it is, but not this state. I asked for the law on it from a man I knew. It's a decent thing. . . ."

"It's the one decency Jamie can lay claim to, marrying the girl. There was talk in the town and filthy words in the talk: 'paramour' was one word, and 'harlot' a word, and 'brothel'; and Candace was no harlot nor my coal-office a brothel, God knows. Jamie, he had one decent wish to prove it to the town. And I studied it out in my mind until I saw that marriage was the decent thing. . . ."

"It was that or the other thing. I see, back a while, it was one or the other with them two. I see that, but I kept Candace here and let them be together. I had to keep her, Mis' Wayne. I had to. She was pullin' Jamie to his feet. The six months she was here, she cooked his food for him and made him eat; and she was tender with him so that he began to hold up his head. And I'd been fighting for him for six years . . ."

stalling with the neighbors here, . . . making the same fight over and over and seeing him slip out from my hands and down . . .”

He paused and Diana, considering him, had a sense of some dark terrifying thing that she could not feel or see or hear. Owen had struggled with it.

“It was drugs,” he said simply, his voice thinning as if the words were pressed out beneath an iron vise. “They sent him home from the army. Folks here about said something was wrong with his record, but they didn’t know the line written against him. A drug it was that left him thread-paper thin and robbed him of any decency a man could lay hold on. There was nothing I could lay hold on . . . but this Candace come here, just as Jamie was getting out of a sickness, when he’d been under a doctor’s care a long time, and far from the drug, and she pulled him up. She made him eat and she was tender with him, so that he pulled himself up, as if he wanted decency. It was the first time. I see how things were drifting, but I didn’t care where they drifted. I was desperate, God knows.”

Sick disgust surged through her as it had the night before when Ace had told her of this marriage. But her repugnance, now, was mingled with a quivering pity. It was as if she discerned another figure in the gray room, as if Candace were standing there with her soft, good-tempered face and that dusky comeliness that would glow luminously in the depths of a lover’s consciousness. A shiver went through her and her gaze fixed on Owen for, in some clear space in her mind beneath disgust and pity, too, was the thought that affliction cometh not forth from the dust.

“But the filthy talk hurt Candace,” he said. “And there was one way Jamie could prove to the town the talk was lies. Marriage, yes. I asked for the law

on it from a man who knew the laws. I studied on it . . . on what Candace was doing for Jamie . . . on the feelings that were growing between them. Grandchildren with black blood in them. Yes, I studied on that, too. . . .

"But then, in the end, this happened. Those men hurt something inside Jamie with their flogging. He was always a cringing lad, God knows, when I had occasion to correct him, but till now I've held there was a spark of decency in him. They've took his decency." He turned his head with a shuddering sob of humiliation. "He's no more than a cur. He lies there screaming curses on his wife or whimpering to be gone, somewhere, far off. I could easier see him in his coffin, dead."

His burring voice sank and ceased, but in the ensuing silence, it seemed to follow Diana, charged with the significance of all confessions; so that she felt herself guiltily possessed of Owen's tragic rage. She saw more than Owen saw. Her thoughts went back to the frail child who had played with Giles, who was frightened and craven under the discipline his father held righteous. Was it the thing which had happened in the ravine that had stripped Jamie Morgan of his decency? Or had it been done here, in this drab, ugly room, years ago? Who could say? Owen had done his best, believing in his heart that to beat a child with a rod was to deliver his soul from hell; but Jamie had been such a bony, cringing little boy. . . .

A knock sounded on the door below, a triple knock, twice repeated. Owen stirred.

"That's Mr. Wayne. Nights when he's come to help me with Jamie in our bad times, he's give me that knock."

"Shall I let him in?"

"I don't care."

She went out of the room. Downstairs, after a struggle with the heavy bolts, she opened the door narrowly and Peniel slipped in out of the drizzle.

"Are you here, Diana? I c-came to s-see Owen, if he's w-willing." He spread his wet umbrella carefully on the floor and retreated to a corner, busying himself with the buttons of his coat. Diana looked at him inattentively. His hair made a silvery patch in the dusk of the hall and his slight figure had such a look of fine-drawn vigor that she was suddenly comforted a little. He could help to lift Owen's burden of despair. He had been for many years a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine; one of those, she thought, able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith they themselves are comforted of God. She could not do that. It was beyond her power. . . .

He lifted his head and she caught a glimpse of a Peniel so unlike her vision of him that she stood puzzled and bewildered, exploring his face with a furtive anxiety. It was lined and drawn into a guarded, fragile mask. His eyes looked like sunken pools, troubled in their bright depths. There was no doubt that he was suffering.

"I d-don't suppose I can d-do any g-good," he stammered, "b-but I c-can stay here all day if Owen will have me."

"Why wouldn't he have you? I expect you're almost the only friend he has, Father Wayne."

Words burst from him chokingly. "Such a dreadful thing, Diana. Such a shocking thing to happen in a decent t-town. No one could have foreseen this. Could they, Diana? It has been hideous f-for you. I wish it hadn't come to you."

"I wish it hadn't come to Chris," she said slowly, "but we neither of us matter, really. You'll understand how little we matter once you've seen Owen." She reached out and touched his wrist. "There's one thing that will shock you, Father Wayne, and Owen won't keep it from you. Jamie married Candace yesterday, in Chicago. He had a glimmer of manliness and made one chivalrous gesture to protect her good name. Owen knew it and didn't lift a finger to prevent it. He sacrificed Candace on the desperate chance of saving Jamie."

Peniel looked down, picking the nails of one hand with the thumbnail of the other, with a small snapping noise.

"But m-m-miscegnation's legal in this state," he looked up with a startled jerk of his head. "It's l-legal, isn't it, Diana?" Suddenly, he pressed one hand over his mouth as if the thing he had said frightened him.

It frightened her. Peniel was waiting for her to speak and she could not, for her thoughts were a turmoil in which disgust and a clear comprehension fought for precedence. She pressed her hands together and fixed her eyes carefully on the darkest corner of the passage. What have you done? she demanded of him silently.

The anguish on his face touched her. Behind it lurked his old innocence and the inexorable Puritanic conscience which would torment him the rest of his life with his own responsibility, in this affair. He had let himself in for spiritual quibbling and the splitting of hairs. He had the zealotry of a generation bred in the furor of Abolition, a sacrificial championship of the negro; but there was in Peniel some admixture not Puritanic. There was that uncalculating pluck which had always been as useless to him as a banner flying

from a Paladin's spear-point. She brushed her fingers across her eyes as if she could clear her thoughts.

"You didn't marry them, Father Wayne?"

"No." Flattened against the wall, he looked at her with his old troubled eyes. "No, I didn't marry them," but in spite of him, his emphasis betrayed him. It wasn't the words, but the accent. "No, I didn't *marry* them," he said.

The door opened and shut. Diana found herself outside the house.

She drove for a long time through a drab countryside blurred by the rain. She seemed unbearably shaken. Before she could trust herself to go home she must get herself in hand, regain self-possession. Once in her own house, she could not betray the woman she inwardly was, twisted with this queer pity for men who digged a pit and stumbled into the ditch they had made. She had to pretend to be so many other women: Peniel's loyal and silent friend, the mistress of a complicated household, a mother who should be serene and wise, in case Chris turned to her, Bob's wife. . . . But, she reminded herself, she was not, really, Bob's wife. Not that it simplified matters.

She sent the servants away and prepared luncheon herself. Peniel did not come home and Chris still slept. Only Robert and Giles sat down with her at the table.

Halfway through their brisk, even talk about politics, Diana asked a question diffidently: "Have you heard anything that puts a new angle on the Morgan situation?"

The two men looked at her doubtfully and in their silence she recognized the masculine desire to quiet her, the unwillingness to heap any fuel of words on the flame of her memories.

"Everything is settling down," Giles said smoothly. "There'll be no race-trouble. The police are watching the south end and the Marshalls are using what influence they have to calm things, which is the most sensible thing they could do. They've put Jamie under an opiate at the hospital and they're planning to get him over into Hatton county."

"But you hadn't heard that he married Candace."

"My God . . . why?"

Diana told them why. She made it very clear, repeating some of Owen's bitter phrases. They listened in an impartial silence and Giles observed:

"We could put heads on that. You've not lost your scent for a story, Di." He left the table and they heard his voice at the telephone. When he came back he said, "Someone would have dug it up in the marriage licenses in a day or two. But we've scooped the *Clarion*, at least."

"Which is largely responsible for what has happened."

"Oh, come, Di . . ."

"Something lies behind an outrage like this in a decent community," she said tensely. "Men don't go mad in a moment. Kurt Raedel has been writing stuff for weeks that has stirred up trouble."

"Trouble was brewing before he wrote a line," Giles asserted. "He publishes a paper which reaches a different class from the *Journal*, people who wouldn't read the *Journal*; and he gives them what they want. He simply gathered up sheaves of gossip and threshed the chaff from the wheat. He's not to blame for the way things turned out. Be reasonable, Di. The most you can say is that Raedel expressed what was public opinion."

"He moulded it. He whipped up the emotions of ignorant people to a crazy fury. The rancor may have been smouldering like fire in the underbrush of a forest, but Kurt Raedel fed the flames . . . unwittingly, perhaps . . . with those salacious hints of his. We . . . decent people have that fire to fight. Fight it till the last flicker of it is gone. . . ."

She put her hand before her eyes, abandoning with the last words, her effort to speak lightly.

"I want the *Journal* to fight it through," she said.

Bob answered her. "You have great faith in the *Journal*, Diana."

"I have great faith in the *Journal*. And I care what happens to Candace Marshall. She is so young, and she isn't wicked or vile. She's wrong . . . she's soft-hearted and ill-advised and wrong, but she isn't vile. And if she were, if she were the vilest creature on earth that provides no justification for what happened to her last night. It was a witch-hunt. . . ." She lifted her head, folding her hands tightly at the edge of the table to keep them from trembling and looked at her husband, steadily.

"Kent has been talking all morning like that," he said, answering her look, "he wants to make an issue of it."

"And you don't?"

"I don't . . . No," he exclaimed with a note of impatience. "I think we're likely to make matters worse rather than better. The incident is news and we'll print it as news; but I'm not sure it's news worth fighting about. It seems a pretty useless business to me."

"Useless?"

"It would be very hard," he said, crisply, "to convince anyone in Anchorage that Jamie Morgan had a

spark of manliness, even once. If this is a chivalrous gesture on his part, it has gone for nothing. The truth won't help Candace. No one would believe that she hadn't been his mistress for months, or that Jamie wasn't forced into marrying her. I'm finding it mighty hard to believe myself. Owen Morgan ought to be whipped at a cart's tail for the part he took in the affair."

She looked away, wondering what Bob would say ought to be done to Peniel for the part he took in it. She saw how useless the truth was, looked at through Robert's eyes.

"I say the less said the better, for the sake of the town," he went on. "The thing is a blot on its decency and one's ashamed that it happened, but the time for speaking out is a trifle inopportune. There's strong feeling abroad, the feeling of a community which is organically inimical toward anyone who flouts its morals. A dozen men took into their own hands the punishment of a man and woman who had violated certain decencies; but no one knows who they were. There's talk on the streets about a Ku Klux in Anchorage, but no one can say its members were the perpetrators of last night's flogging. It would be very difficult to fasten responsibility, anywhere." He hesitated an instant and added. "And the authorities have made no effort, so far, to fasten responsibility. We know that."

Diana was conscious of a tremor of excitement. As if something invisible and menacing were gathering itself in a thick darkness. She thought of Kurt Raedel, his gaunt, swaggering figure blurred in the stir of mysterious malignancies, presenting itself as a symbol for formless tyrannical compulsions.

Giles thrust a suggestion into their silence.

"A senator will be nominated in April, Mrs. Wayne."

"That has nothing to do with this," she protested sharply.

"Nothing." Bob's amused tone reassured her. "Jamie and Candace Morgan can hardly affect a state primary. The man who is nominated for senator will be the man with the party organization behind him and the money. I regret overthrowing any of your cherished ideals, Giles, but it is money that talks. The voice of the pee-pul sinks to a whisper."

"Bob, that is a dreadful thing to say."

"The truth is always dreadful." He had taken out a cigar and was lighting it with his characteristic air of concentration. "Haven't you discovered that, Diana?"

She lifted her head, arrested. But his face was impassive.

"Look here, my dear," he said, "D'you really want this? Even though it's useless, would you vote with Kent to make an issue of it?"

"Even though it's useless, . . ." She broke off, seeing in a flash what Bob was doing. It was as if he had said: "There is little enough I can give you, my dear. I can't give you the past, nor an old rapture, nor even my desire; so I'll give you this, if you want it." He was making a generous gesture, but it was directed sketchily toward Giles, too, in defiance of his sly innuendo. She drew a deep breath and said: "I do want it. It is the single possible chance to vindicate Candace."

"We'll do it, then." A slight precision of manner was the only indication of his own reluctance. He went on, elaborating his spirited gesture toward Giles. "We

have been checking up my chances, Gretcher and I. Senator Moulden's organization is important because it handles the Federal patronage, but it's rather gone to pieces since he took himself out of the running; there've been feuds between some of the strongest men in it and they're taking the occasion to pay each other out. If Cretcher can pull it together and add it to his own organization, he's invincible and the whole strength he has goes to my campaign. There's some talk of the bunch being divided between Conway and me, but though Conway was Moulden's lawyer and campaign manager, he's not popular. If he comes out for the place, we'll have to do some intensive work through the winter to beat him. We're waiting to find out just what it is we have to do."

"But it means you'll be gone from home more than ever," Diana said quietly.

Robert straightened his shoulders. "More than ever," he agreed.

* *

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Kent wrote:

"Anchorage stands before its State, indicted as a lawless city, a city where people are at the mercy of mob-fury. . . . There is no justification for the exercise of mob law. . . . That lawlessness may be accomplished through an organization engaged in acts injurious to public order, is the material issue for the people of the State to face. It is without authority for its interference with individuals and in public life. Its masked irresponsibility is an instrument of terrorism. Under a pretense of rectitude, it violates decency by night-prowling, by intimidation of citizens and officials and by its attempts to dominate the authorities.

. . . If the crime perpetrated in Anchorage is not the crime of an organization, the members of it owe to the community, as decent citizens, their support to the police in their effort to punish the guilty. . . ."

And distorted excerpts were quoted in other papers, as if what Kent wrote were important. The Chicago papers used certain paragraphs of succeeding editorials in a symposium on mob outrages. But no particular effort was made to punish the guilty, or to fasten responsibility on any person. Presently, the flurry died away. No word came back from Jamie Morgan. Candace caught hold of life unsteadily and the Marshalls instituted proceedings to have her marriage annulled. Old Owen advertised his yards for sale and shut himself into his dark house while he waited for a buyer, leaving them to a stripling who robbed him in small, bushel-basket thievings.

Life for Diana Wayne hung in suspension. The gray blur of November faded and it was winter. The stripped branches of the maples stood against the gray sky in a strong pattern, thin mists of snow drifted over the lawn and the golf course, wind-driven in wisps and spirals and a lacery of snow, clung, frozen, to the boles of the trees. . . .

* * *

Diana was sitting in the drawing-room of a train that slid over the dark prairie. It had been dusk when they left Chicago and, at dinner, they had passed through its ugly suburbs, formless huddles of factory chimneys and squat houses, picked out with flickering lights. But, here, she was aware of open farmlands with the smoky mist laid down on their chill expanses, of a vague shell of sky and the sustained throbbing rhythm of the wheels on steel rails.

Opposite her sat the two women she had entertained at dinner, who were continuing in her company while Robert talked politics with their husbands in the smoking room. One of them was lovely, the young wife of a state official. Pale shining hair and a bloodlessly cool face with lips whose composure was complete. When she spoke, her voice had a fluting sweetness and the corners of her mouth tilted, smiling in a sweet, limited smile; but she gave out nothing. She was unruffled, null, gracious. . . . Beside her was a broad, brisk creature with a plump face, adorned by dark-rimmed spectacles under a brimless satin hat. Her eyes glinted with earnestness. She shed benignity and eagerness, but she should not have worn a hat without a brim; and her face glistened; and she wheezed a little, breathed through her nose when she talked. Diana perfunctorily listened. . . .

She was thinking that people such as these were the living barrier she and Robert put between them. Across the wall of their unimportant flesh, husband and wife flung each other charming compliments, they chatted about obvious, insignificant matters, they laughed; they got on very well. Robert's reserve and courtesy made everything easy for Diana. They could go on like that, all their lives.

Unpleasant things could be postponed. The material aspects of life did not change. The narrow margin of their leisure was filled with amusing incidents, dancing, bridge, the parties which, after the first drink, were all more or less alike, with skilled servants to carry them through even when hosts and guests grew a bit foggy and unconcerned. They had caught hold of gay streamers of the general impatience with tame living. . . .

The plump woman was saying earnestly: "We must get out the woman's vote. My idea is to have a woman

in every block and hold her *responsible* for *everybody*. People ought to be *made* to do right. So *many* women, this day and age, especially the younger women with money, think of *nothing* but amusing themselves, and they've no right to because there's so *much* to be done. I belong to eight clubs myself . . . or is it seven? Or nine? Let me see. There's the Woman's Club and the Parent-Teachers' and the House and Garden . . ."

Diana ceased listening altogether and began to think, instead, of Kurt Raedel whom she had seen in the dining car, alone, with a pamphlet propped against his glass. His red hair had been a crude blotch beyond her and she could just see his gaunt cheekbones, the line of his jaw and chin. He had left before her guests had finished and bowed gravely in passing, his flat green eyes regarding her with a blunted stare. Then he stopped to say a word to Robert and moved away into the corridor.

When the others left at their station and, through the rumble of the train, she heard him speaking to Robert outside the door, she quickened with excitement. The memory of his ruthless caresses came back to her and her own anger; but as Robert opened the door, the apathy on which she had drawn for strength for weeks was pouring into her, steadying her. It was easier to have any third person with them than to be alone.

Raedel sat down on the seat opposite and said immediately:

"I asked to talk with you, Wayne, because we've an hour to spare and it will save time later. I was coming to you, anyway, in the morning. I've decided to jog on with the *Clarion* as it is and not make this combine with the *Journal*."

Robert's voice was surprised. "No? What's happened?"

"The merchants are against it. They want the competition on account of advertising rates. You aren't disposed to transient advertising; you want yearly contracts even with the smaller merchants."

"That isn't exactly true. We . . ."

"You don't refuse but your rates are high for everything but the contract advertising. The common idea seems to be that with only one paper in the town, they'll go higher. After all, the deal between us has been mostly conversation. The final papers haven't been drawn."

"They're being drawn this week."

"They've not been signed," Raedel said blandly.

Diana felt Bob's quiet beside her. His fingers spread, stiff and wide, and clenched slowly on his knee. His face took on its inscrutable look. After a moment's hesitation, he said to Raedel:

"But there is something more behind this."

"A good deal. The *Clarion* is mine, my own, an entity in itself. I find I don't want it destroyed. It was Mrs. Wayne who put the feeling into words for me, in a talk we had. Has she ever told you about that talk? Not that it was especially important."

Diana considered him coolly. She was feeling that Kurt Raedel was deadly because he had only contempt for authority. He was Borgian in spirit, one of those ruffianly marauders who loot and pillage as they choose. He had lived for a cause that had made for revolt and blood-shed; and found it fruitless. So he had yielded, as Robert yielded, for different reasons, to the pressure of expediency. He was, ruthlessly, for himself. How dreadful he seemed. That stormy face, that thin mouth, those derisive eyes, glowing like a

green flame under his rough brows . . . he was wholly repulsive.

Oh . . . not wholly. Why pretend? He drew you as much as he repelled. An aura of vitality was shed from him like a faint dangerous radiance. In simpler circumstances she might have loved him, Diana thought, wrenched with the truth. And she saw herself, in the first young consciousness of emotion, vulnerable and romantic, loving him wildly for his eyes, for his unforgettable face, for his swaggering ruthlessness. He could have swept her away.

"I didn't tell him . . . no," she interrupted with an odd irony in her voice. "As you say, it wasn't especially important."

But she felt that she had given her thoughts away to him. His slow smile, as he went on talking with Robert, held his contempt for easily won women.

He saw the clear mortification on her face and was startled to find himself regretting it. Kurt Raedel rarely repented the wounds he gave women because they were such credulous and docile fools. They waged their eternally futile conflict with men's wills and passions and then came submissively to hand, led by their own vanity and blindfolded by self-deception. Only he failed with Diana Wayne and his failure chagrined him more than he thought possible; he had wanted her to be kind, for she had the power to satisfy a secret hunger in him, if she would. He could hardly believe, even now, that she would not, but he did not think of her as easy. He judged her capable of ecstasy and steadfastness and a passion rare enough in women and in her still unstirred. He wanted to be the man to stir it . . . because he was certain that Robert Wayne had not. She had been so young when she married that

whatever love she had given him was a light thing to what she could experience now. She was made for love and he would have liked to hunt her down, make her his quarry, a wild thing to be trapped; but the shamed look on her face, which was there, he felt, because he had given her an ugly memory, hurt him. He had proved himself a bungler, for once.

Still, they would never be indifferent to each other. Whatever feeling beat between them would be strong feeling, love, sometime, perhaps; or an enmity so unbearably near to love that an instant of revelation would change one to the other . . . it would be enmity, more likely. They would be held close by this bond of enmity, as if they were forces implacably at odds.

Diana had a flicker of admiration for the quiet with which Robert veiled his dismay at Raedel's desertion. His poker-player's face was smooth as stone and faintly smiling. And he was imperturbably courteous while she cried out silently, "Why have you changed like this? What are you holding back behind your excuses?" What purpose, what mysterious knowledge impelled controlled this decision? And what was the use of talking at all when that secret purpose was there, beyond their words, unspoken and unacknowledged?

They were coming into Anchorage. Masses of low buildings were smudged against the sky, lights flickered in the long streets that seemed to turn on an axis as the train ran past and, beyond the river, the foundries showed black with the glow of hot metal thrown up through the misty snow.

"Ace is bringing the car to the station so we can take you home, Raedel," Robert said politely. "You'll let us take you home?"

"No," he answered with curtness in his voice.
"Thanks."

He slid forward as Bob stood up to get his coat. His face was close to Diana's for an instant, so close that his lips almost brushed her cheek. His whisper pricked her with its mockery:

"Diana. Diana . . . crowned with the moon. . . ."

VII

THE winter marked the beginning of loneliness; a curious loneliness bred by her recognition of the estrangement between Robert and Kent Amlie. Though nothing was altered on the surface, though the customary order went on as if it could never change, nothing brought her even a momentary illusion of intimacy. Their sturdy comradeship had thinned; in the same room, they seemed withdrawn, wrapped in constraint, and their words, punctilious and commonplace, were the mocking symbols of all that was incommunicable. Something had gone out of life; something deeper and subtler than anything to which she could put a name, some strengthening of detachment so that they seemed shrouded from each other, cloaked in the absorptions that men and women learn to wrap about themselves. Robert was at home very little. Kent rarely came to the house. The light-hearted evenings when they planned for the future and talked over the oddities of Anchorage ceased altogether.

She came in to lunch, one day in February, and was told that Robert had called her on long-distance. Ace had taken down his message which was to the effect that he was coming home on the five o'clock train, was dining with Casely Sneed at his club, and wished to see her before that. Would she be in Kent's office, at the plant, at five?

She found Giles with Kent. They bent, shoulder to shoulder, over the long table in the center of the room and their faces, sharp and distinct, in the light flung

down on them from the ceiling looked grotesque, like gargoyles. They were so absorbed that they did not hear her cross the room behind them.

"Are you two reading the *Clarion*?" asked Diana.

They straightened and swung about. Giles gathered the paper together but Diana reached out and took it from him.

"Raedel has come out for Conway," Kent said. "It sounds incredible put, like that, into words. He's walking at the front of the procession, ballyhooing. And about Bob. Don't let his leader make you angry, Diana."

She swirled the sheets wide and the room receded as the print sprang into meaning under her eyes. She was very angry and puzzled as well. He used ridicule like a lash, stinging, vituperative ridicule. But what puzzled her was Raedel's motive in supporting James Conway. He was a dullard. He was also the hardest and most obdurate man in the state. Unlike Cretcher, who preferred intrigue and secret power to the details of responsibility and shifted with the times, Conway entrenched himself in obstinacy, and his stupidity became a rock against which the waves of change flailed uselessly. He did not argue, he did not promise anything, he did not give way. He remained stolid and tenacious; and when their conflicting interests brought his associates into a muddle, they flung themselves back to the safety of his stubborn bigotry. There seemed no point between Conway's conservatism and the ruthless radicalism of Raedel where they could meet. Yet they had met, it was plain. They were being drawn together by some unseen compulsion, some delicate flexure of secret forces. That night on the train, in December, when Kurt Raedel had refused to merge the *Clarion* with the *Journal*, he knew this was ahead. . . .

She said, quite evenly: "D'you notice the *Clarion* has a new make-up? Better paper, altogether, and different stock-heads and type."

"Someone is backing him," Kent said easily, "They're strange bedfellows, those two, but politics does that as necessity. It must be they've broken with Ralph Cretcher."

Robert's step sounded in the corridor and his voice dropped, cut down sharply. He stopped an instant on the threshold, with his coat flung across his arm and his hat in his hand, looking at them; but meeting their charged silence, he hesitated and turned from them, slowly closing the door. His shoulder pressed against the wood, his eyes were lowered to the knob and, in profile, his head seemed carved out of stone. Then he swung about, lifting his eyes to Diana's, and she saw in them such chagrin and anger that she was startled. In a careless voice, Robert said:

"Cretcher has double-crossed me."

He flung his coat over the back of a chair and sat down. His face was an uneven color. It looked worn and altered and heavy lines sagged across his cheeks.

"Has he carried his whole organization with him, Bob?" Kent asked.

"His own and the remnants of Moulden's that were for Conway. Have you seen the *Clarion*? They're not all going against me, for they're rowing among themselves over patronage. And Boyd Despard . . . his paper and his influence . . . is for me. I have a chance, still."

The conference, they gathered, had been a delirium of bickering and recrimination. Robert had gone to Chicago to meet Cretcher, expecting nothing more than the final settlement of campaign details. He had thought himself their chosen candidate and had counted

on their recognition. He had a right to hope for it; for years he had stood at the center of political affairs, with a voice in the councils of his party, asking for nothing so long as Moulden was returned; but there was no one else to whom he owed allegiance. And, all his life, he had wanted power. He had begun building for this, when he bought the *Journal*, putting down his foundations carefully deep out of sight; he had dreamed of it before that, in college, and before that, as a little boy lying in the dusty depths of his father's haymow. He had seen himself growing up to power. He wanted it now, more than anything in life. He had his hands on it, touching it. . . .

"Under the wrangling there is some definite opposition," he said. "It wasn't there last September and I can't put my finger on it, now. I can't believe that the promise of power in an Invisible Empire has turned Cretcher; but against belief I suspect . . . something. Some influence is behind this. This editorial of Raedel's was planned to come today, while the others were talking to me. It's the opening shot in the campaign. They said some queer things."

"What sort of things?"

"Ambiguous . . . veiled. But they hung, I inferred, on the *Journal's* stand in the Morgan business."

Kent swung in his swivel chair, very intent.

"We took that stand on principle, Bob."

"I know."

There was a shadow on his face, an obscure resentment; as if he blamed them for the stand the *Journal* had taken. And Diana remembered that he had good-humoredly opposed it and had yielded only because her impulsive compassion ran out to Owen and Candace, and Kent Amlie made a fetish of principle. She sat with folded hands, looking at him. He is angry and

troubled and utterly separated from us, she said to herself, and thought that it would be hard to find the frank lover she had lived with for years, in this heavy man who was staring at her with that veiled displeasure.

"What are you going to do?" she asked abruptly.

"Tell them to go to hell," he said.

"You can't do that, Bob," Kent said quietly.

"I can chuck it, the whole business. It's too chancy a fight."

"Don't you want to fight?"

Robert did not answer and Diana knew that troubled and chagrined as he was, the defiant longing to fight to the end filled his mind. He thought of nothing but to go on, fighting. . . .

Kent repeated with his quiet intensity:

"You can't chuck it, if you've a fighting chance. And you have a chance, as good as Conway's or better. You have your own paper behind you, and Boyd Despard's in Chicago. You've two months of campaigning before the primary and the primary is to your advantage, to the advantage of the best man rather than the party-man. At least, that was the point we made when we were fighting for it; we'll test it. If there is an invisible government in this state, there'll be a faction opposed to it, and some leaders will rally to you on that account. You can build an organization of your own."

Robert's eyes narrowed: "There is a fighting chance, of course."

"Well?"

"It means hard work for you, Kent. It throws the business on you."

Kent smiled. "I'm the sort who sits, mending armor, with a back against the wall, while the strong men go

to battle. I'll have young Dorsett on the copy-desk and shift Giles into the managing end. That would come in time, anyway, if you win the election. Giles won't mind."

"I shan't mind," Giles said in his smooth voice, "I've done everything: leg-work, sports, copy-desk, make-up. It's time I was moving on."

Robert was silent and preoccupied. Kent leaned forward, still nursing his ankle and spoke in a curt voice.

"There is a principle at stake, Bob; this isn't simply a matter of expediency. We took a stand when the night-riders flogged Jamie Morgan, on an issue that may be the vital issue of the campaign this year. We'll discard it, if you say so; or we'll play it up as a plank in your platform, which I'd like. I hate compromising with principle. If you think Cretcher double-crossed you because some secret influences blacklisted you for the *Journal's* stand, let him go. You don't have to knuckle to Cretcher."

"Cretcher has the money," Robert said.

"Can't you get money?"

"That is what I've been asking myself. I wrote him my check for five thousand in October for the pool; and he's said nothing about giving it back. I think he is certain I'll step down and out, quietly. And most of the men who'd promised to contribute have gone with Cretcher. You can't run a campaign without funds. Headquarters in a Chicago hotel, stenographers, advertisers, expenses for your workers . . . it counts up. Cretcher estimated the minimum at a hundred thousand."

The room grew still. Diana felt her heart grow still with it and bending forward, she looked at Robert's face. An unaccustomed color showed in his dusky skin, his eyes, grave and intent, were on Kent. Suddenly he

bent his head and passed his hand over his face. It was then that Kent said, in that quiet voice:

"You have the *Journal* behind you, Funds? . . . We can mortgage the *Journal*."

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The mortgage brought changes, and the first precious fruits went to Giles Ennis.

Giles had been with the paper nearly six years, winning from Robert and Kent a constantly increasing confidence. He was a brilliant reporter, shrewd, nervy, clever, but his success at newsgetting was only partly because he was unflaggingly keen for news. It was as much that people liked him at first sight, because he was young and good-looking and had attractive manners. It was difficult to meet Giles and not be softened by his charm. He was always lightly agreeable, always good-tempered. His gay cynicisms and his laughter hid well whatever savage ambitions might be lurking below them.

He was never, like Diana, secretly romantic about his craft. He saw it as a poor craft, in the main, and he had a cool disdain for the men who subsisted by it, tamely, enslaved in its routine, content with a competence. He meant, himself, to have a place among the capitalists who traded in the commodity of news and wrought therefrom for their power and glory. Giles knew what he wanted. He had known, always, since he was very young, and his knowledge made him strong, stronger than any of them, than Robert or Diana or Kent, who only dreamed dreams when they were young and fought to make them true.

In the main, he wanted concrete things. Money. Long low cars, Oil shares and rubber shares and muni-

cipal bonds, done up in neat packets. Club memberships that spelled distinction even in Chicago or New York. Pleasure . . .

Most of his desires seemed strangely sophisticated, astonishing in the commonplace town, and astonishing in Giles himself considering what he was, by birth and training. But the ordinary things which added zest to the lives of the men with whom he mingled: their business schemes, their simple hearty absorption in motor-cars and golf and food, their seasonal madness for sports . . . bored Giles past words. The inviolable current of his life moved guardedly in the wider current of his world. Secretly.

Sensation was the elixir of life. He went seeking it in covert places, a noiseless alert hunting creature, moving alone. He found it sitting in a certain New York office, suspended above the earth like a motionless plane, with gulls sweeping past its windows, and glimpses of the harbor far below, and listening while men talked about money in the fabulous terms of wheat harvests and forests cut for paper and the year's run of iron ore on the Mesaba range. Something in him grew tense and quick as if he touched metal charged with electricity. He found it, too, in steamy Harlem night-clubs, when he was drawn down into a muck of heat and heavy fragrances of food and flesh and the distilled scents of flowers, into a savage jungle, suffocating, mysterious, with a pulsing throb of sound in it, of reedy flutes and silver-throated horns, welling up into unmelodious harmonies, thrumming about him with a syncopation that touched his nerves like cocaine.

In Anchorage, he was forced to spin sensation out of himself, making a fragile floating web that sustained him as if he were a spider at its center. Again and

again, he fell back on experiments with women, though the stupid ones wearied him quickly and most of his ventures played out like dull farces. He liked making love, lightly, to very young girls, watching their startled flowering under his touch. Best of anything, he liked dancing with Evelyn Painter. The stir of her slender body in his arms, responding to the broken rhythm of the music, was the quintessence of sensation. But he withheld tenderness because its lack added piquancy to their comradeship, because she would be so utterly, wearily yielded up to him, once he told her his thoughts. Giles meant, sometime, to marry Evelyn Painter. . . .

But this was his secret being. Nobody caught glimpses of it, except Diana, and she darkly, with the vague feeling that the little boy who had grown up in her house, was lost behind that locked, mirthful face. She had no key to Giles. No chance look gave her the secret of him; she saw of him only the pattern he willed. He was, always, very charming.

At the plant, he seemed a different person from what he was outside. His sleek grace changed; he looked older and his face bent above Robert's desk, settled into tense lines. He had snatched at the chance to prove himself suited to newspaper management and was intent upon it, but his intensity was betrayed only by the fact that his slightest failure humiliated him beyond all reason. Failure, to Giles, was the unforgivable offense. . . .

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The mortgage on the *Journal* stood at a hundred thousand and the money ran away like water. To Diana it was incredible that a free gift of the people

could cost so much. Were they mad, possessed? Were they all dancing after a rainbow bubble that would float, somewhere, over the edge of a precipice?

There were times, when she thought of the months to come, that her courage failed. A cold fear lay hidden in the recesses of her thoughts. She who had run to meet life recklessly found herself haunted constantly by a menacing unease, like a dream which rouses a sleeper into sweating dread. It was the figure of Helene Kennedy that moved across the dream, that was the secret of her fear. How was it possible for a man like Robert Wayne to have a liaison for eight years and not have it known? Kurt Raedel would seize avidly on any scandal which he could use against Robert. Often, when she closed her eyes, a streamer of words ran threateningly against their lids. Definite precise words, slashed out in the black type of *Clarion* headlines. They were not in the least vague or dreamlike; they formed as hard as dark crystal on a white surface. It was ridiculous, of course, it was a figment of her imagination, all of it. But it seemed curious that Helene Kennedy had not already told him. Or Giles, perhaps, in a moment of amusement. The thing that was Diana's secret shame had amused Giles.

She saw little of Robert who was giving himself to his campaign with an obstinate, concentrated intensity as if nothing else in the world mattered. Diana had a queer feeling that, without volition, he set her aside because what she had to give him was worthless. Except for perfunctory kindnesses which had to do with food and rest, in his brief hours at home, she was useless to him. There was no comfort of the spirit he could take from her. She saw it in those sudden moments of waking at night, in her moods of longing for the trusting intimacy of the past, in the hours when she

fought with a sense of her ineptitude and Robert was imperturbably unapproachable.

He was constantly away from home, making speeches up and down the state and spending long hours with editors and politicians. His influence had been wide and his friends many, but he discovered that the best of friends could be non-committal and evasive. As the weeks went on, however, it was obvious that Robert had an advantage over James Conway. The *Clarion* was almost alone in the bitterness of its attack; powerful Chicago papers supported him and the small-town editors rallied to the leadership of the *Anchorage Journal*. All that Conway possessed lay in the organization controlled by Cretcher's influence.

Or was there a vast, secret influence behind him? Was Raedel moving against Robert Wayne for no reason that was personal, except as bigotry and violence were always personal? They did not know. To their sensitive perceptions, there seemed, sometimes, a resistant pull as if something, growing restless in inactivity, had turned; and talking together, they imagined they could see into causes which would make the slow growth of that menace possible: the involved factors of trades-unions in politics, prohibition enforcement, even the Fundamentalist movement in religion, a coalescing of mugwump minorities into a group sustained by ignorance and intolerance and fear. Most churches were built on such emotions; and all cruelties.

But they had no proof of . . . anything. Whisperings came to their ears, gossip of a secret fight for righteousness against crooked politics and vice, boot-legging and Sabbath ball-playing; but behind the rumors was a vast, unbreakable silence. There was no newspaper publicity; no hint was made that the cam-

paign would not end tamely, at the primary. Once, Kent got his hands on a secret report of all the candidates. It began; "To Genii, Grand Dragons, Hydras of Realms . . . ," and there was an insignia of a dragon with arrowheads for tongue and tail. Under the flummery of words the report was incredibly complete in its information, a thing so elaborate as to be possible only with an espionage system of unbelievable efficiency. Penciled across the margin was a faint line: "The Word goes forth on the Eve. Wait for the Eve. Wait for the Word."

It was as baffling as fighting a specter behind a veil. No man could calculate his chances against that invisible antagonist, subtle, omniscient, immune in secrecy. Something was there, in the shadows, holding a weapon and ready to direct a blow . . . a blow which, if it came, would be struck in the dark, leaving no clue. Only the money pouring out for the campaign was tangible. It was like a cataract of thick golden wheat, the garnerings of years, pouring out from the open throat of an elevator where it had been stored, and vanishing in mid-air. . . .

Diana slipped away one night, toward the end of March, to Apple River, thirty miles distant, where Robert was speaking at a banquet. She had considered asking Chris or Giles to escort her and decided against it, thinking that if Bob should discover her, it would be easier to face him alone; but it wasn't likely that he would discover her. He was speaking early and leaving at once on a tour through the southern part of the state. He would not be back in Anchorage for a fortnight.

She sat in a corner of a gallery packed with faces that were dyed an ochereous drab by the yellow lights. Below in a square hall, rows of tables were set like

teeth in a coarse comb. The banquet, considered as a matter of food, had come to an end and only the white stoneware cups littered the rumpled cloth. People had pushed back, chattering, the doors stood open on a stone corridor and boys were dragging chairs noisily into the gloom under the gallery. Dangling from a ring fastened to the railing before her, was a bottomless net; and Diana thought of Chris who loved basketball with a clearer passion than he gave to other sports. She could picture his long figure quivering upward for a tap-off and his brown face shining. A throb of pride in him, intolerably sharp, went through her and she turned her eyes to the hall below.

Without anticipation her glance fell on Robert. He was sitting at the center of the comb's back, his heavy shoulders leaning forward, his head bent courteously toward a plump woman at his right. Something familiar in the broad face under a brimless satin hat caught Diana's attention and she evolved from the distant features the face of the woman with whom she had traveled down from Chicago. But the coarse light somehow changed her, revealing an authentic quality, a dignity in her which gave Diana a quick pleasure. I've remembered her all wrong, she thought, she is real. Here, at what was plainly to her a sacramental gathering, she seemed put, beautifully, in her rightful place. Suddenly, she began to beat her hands together like a pair of cymbals and Diana heard a clamor of clapping. Robert's familiar voice rose to her as the applause died away. He stood before his audience with a rapt look on his dark inscrutable face and his voice, deliberate and firm, commenced to build an argument as clear as a crystal causeway from his mind to theirs.

Diana twisted, staring round her to see what these

people who looked attentive and sagacious might be making of it. But those nearest her stayed in a sheepish torpidity, their faces, mildly languid, hazed with quiet. The rows of shielded lights gave out a dull, blurred glow, floating above the shadows on the floor and the shadowed faces. The scene was nebulous, unreal. A speaker could as usefully have been gesticulating before shapes painted in attentive postures on a transparency.

And Robert cared so much. Diana pressed her hands together tensely, turning back to him. He had dreamed of this since the time when they were young and saw struggle as a splendid thing, when their high spirits guaranteed them that life would be glorious and fine. It was dreadful to care about its rewards as Robert cared for this. . . . She was amazed that he could turn the hot anxieties of his mind into these cool statements of political economy, betraying nothing of the secret, desirous man behind them.

But she lost track of his words in a satirical compassion for that man. She sat on, hating the ugly room with its inane shufflings and breathings, its stupid faces. Robert's voice was a thin sound pushing through the density of inertia. She heard its hoarseness, its weariness, and she was filled with a fierce pity for him and a fierce wordless longing that he might have his heart's desire untarnished by disappointment or disaster. But, for a moment, the foreboding of disaster lay upon her as if above the faint murmurs of the room, above the sound of Robert's voice, she heard the marching footsteps of events. As if she were crouched, with her ear to the earth, listening. . . .

Yet, as she drove back alone to Anchorage, Diana felt a curious lightening of the spirit. All this would

soon be over. Whether Bob won office or failed to win it, he had fought a gallant fight. He had come cleanly through this bitter campaign, unblemished so far as his reputation was concerned. All her secret fears had been absurd. Raedel, virulent as his expressions were, had flung no mud at Robert's character and that secret report had been formal concerning him, revealing nothing shameful in his life. They were in debt and that was serious, since Kent's capital was involved with theirs, but the *Anchorage Journal*, jeopardized though it was, had the power within itself to pull free of debt, in time. The future held a priceless security; peace after turmoil.

The night air swept in to her in waves that smelled of wet earth and the young moon set early in a white mist. Diana drove faster, the straight road flung colorlessly ahead in the glare of the lights and from the height, where roads crossed, she saw the lights of Anchorage, a pale translucence, on the night. Her own house lay nearer than the town. She saw its long shape, spread peacefully on the knoll under the bare maples, throwing out the warmth of faintly lighted windows in a tranquil welcome.

As she stopped the car on the drive, she saw that someone was sitting on the bench in the angle of the stone chimney. She moved slowly across the terrace. As she came closer a thick figure rose to meet her; and Sue Bush's voice said:

"Is that you, Mis' Wayne? We been waitin' here for you to come."

Diana peered at her face questioningly.

"Waiting outside, Sue? But you must be chilled through. Why didn't you go in?"

"I didn't know whether you'd want us in, Mis'

Wayne." She drew in her breath with a slow, thick gasp. "We got bad news. But we got t' tell it, we gotta. I made Angie come. Angie . . ."

Angie came to the threshold of the vestibule. The light from within fell upon her. Under her tiny hat, her pale hair lay softly against her cheek, her vague blue eyes looked out in their transparent stare. Standing before Diana, she suddenly bent her supple knees in the curtsy Sue had taught her when she was a little girl. As if she wanted to gain a moment's time. . . .

"Mrs. Wayne, there's something you ought to know . . ." Her red lips wore a banal little smile and her voice was monotonous, flinging out words with a shrill bravado, "Mrs. Wayne, there's something. . . . Did you know Chris was the father of the baby I'm going to have?"

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Chris. Chris. Chris.

She became aware of the thrumming of his name, through her mind, like a cry. She was sitting very erect, very still staring at a blank bright window across the room, between Peniel and Giles. She was so quiet that she seemed scarcely to breathe. Giles had just said something flippant on which she was trying to fix her attention.

"Why keep the young illusioned? Disillusionment is much easier to bear at twenty than thirty-five."

But the words ran out meaninglessly. Chris . . . Chris. She was feeling within her the first delight in the small strong thing she had brought into being. She had rejoiced fiercely in her son, rejoiced that the hand of the Potter had been steady when he molded that vibrant clay. Chris. He had been a roguish baby, who

slept curled up like a puppy and woke, kicking and chuckling. He had tumbled about out-doors, in fields and woods with the jollity of a brown Puck. She remembered watching him running from her and thinking that he flung out his legs like a clumsy colt . . . she remembered quick kisses, his sunshiny carelessness . . . the way he smiled through his lashes. His Indian-like adolescence held within its reticences a promise of something strong and victorious. Every hour of her journey with him to this place had held some delight; but the horror of this place, seen from whatever viewpoint, had begun to be an agony when his name broke on her consciousness. "Chris . . . Chris," she murmured and her eyes softened with the look she had turned on Chris himself, the night before.

. . . There had been a moment when she wanted to put her hands at Angie's childish throat and choke her, blacken that pert rouged face. She had not cried out but her whole body shook. Then she had flung the door open and ordered the two women in before her, in a soft, rough voice. She had called Chris. When she found he had gone to bed, she made him get up and dress.

They had come, all four of them, into this room, this intimate, friendly room. The clarity of her horror gave them an unmitigated sharpness. Angie's liquid eyes and her coat flung back from her slim, self-conscious body. Sue, with her hands clasped on her knees, her head bowed in inarticulate misery. Chris, his white sweater rolled back from his throat, sulky and resistant.

"No," Chris had said.

Angie's nasal argot rose insolently against him. The smile on her painted mouth was evidence that she was

aware of the effect she was making and dramatized it; but she gave, exactly, a date, details. And with a sick rage licking at her heart, Diana remembered the night she had seen them, standing in the shrubbery.

"No," Chris said. His eyes moved to Angie's face and his gaze lay on her like a heavy yoke of contempt. "No."

"Why . . . Chris Wayne," Angie cried shrilly, "how can you lie like that?"

But when Chris lied, he always lied like that, reticently and firmly. It had happened only once or twice in his lifetime, but Diana recalled how he had looked and how, at the pass, he told his lie curtly and stuck to it through thick and thin. She thought of Robert, lying. . . .

Oh, this thing was possible. Her very love of Chris might have blinded her, Diana thought, and a faint doubt persisted in her thoughts, though she would not acknowledge it even to herself. She was afraid of her love. Sue believed all Angie was saying. Her face in the shadow was a smudge, blotched and dark with grief.

Chris got to his feet, showing a back that looked thick because he was hanging his head and looking down at the floor. The rigidity of his body and the suggestion in his twitching mouth that he was shaken with hatred, was not proof, Diana reminded herself, of innocence. He lifted his blazing eyes and looked at Angie.

"No," he whispered, "it's not true."

A soft, violent cry escaped Diana. It was hardly stronger than a sigh but into it were crushed her fears, her memories, all her love for him. She could feel the anger pounding in his body as if his heart lay on hers with pulses that beat double. A heavy silence spread

through the room. Talking was useless. Against the rock of his denials, nothing they could say would bring them closer to the truth. . . .

Looking at Giles, Diana managed to say quietly: "Have you talked to Chris?"

"He was browsing about the house when I got in. Two o'clock . . . three, perhaps," he said lightly, answering her glance. "He said very little. I gathered he was fed up with women. He wanted a man's point of view."

"What did you say to him, Giles?"

But Giles did not tell her what he had said. His eyes forgot to guard themselves and sparkled with amusement.

"You're taking this with too much anguish, Di. You know what the younger generation is. . . . Or do you cover your ears with your white hands and close your eyes? It's a dirty decade. And how! They're wise, these kids. They experiment with everything."

Peniel quavered: "I d-don't know what the w-world is coming to," but a pain rang in the helpless, worn words that was like Diana's own, and she turned her face to him. "Chris came down-stairs," he said, "just after me, this morning. He took the c-car and d-drove off. D-do you know where he's gone, Diana?"

"I knew he was going."

He had knocked at her door at daylight. She was lying with the sheets wrapped about her closely, like cerements; and as she struggled to get free, he had spoken through the door. "Mother, may I take the car? I want to drive." And she had answered, "Yes."

But she should not have let him go. Why had he wanted to drive? And where? A thorny terror tore at her thoughts. Scenes formed and dissolved in an in-

stantaneous succession. Chris and Angie standing before a justice-of-the-peace in a dingy courtroom, somewhere. Would he take that way out? Or worse ways? Chris, smashing head on into a huge tree. Chris sending the car over the rock which jutted above a quarry pool at Blair. Chris, driving recklessly on and on. . . . "Oh, he should be home by now," she murmured, "When he went I thought he'd be back for breakfast."

"No, Chris wasn't coming home for b-breakfast," said Peniel. He gnawed reflectively at his white mustache. "Lunch, he said, I think; or was it d-dinner? If he'd meant dinner, I'd have thought of supper, I'm sure. I always do think of it that way, you know, Diana. I g-got so used to d-dinner at noon, when I was young. I'd have thought supper, I know, and I didn't; I thought d-dinner. So it must be lunch he's coming to. He came back and p-poked his head in at the t-terrace door to tell me. Lunch, I'm sure he said. D-don't worry. Diana. P-please don't worry about the b-boy."

She bent her head, feeling quick tears of relief smart under her eyelids. As she pressed her fingers to the corners of her eyes, she heard Giles say:

"Chris has been unlucky, that's all. He'd be putty, anyway, in the arms of a girl like Angie Bush. Any boy might be who risked making love to her. She may be shoddy but she's more alive than most of the flappers he'd find."

"Perhaps they're neither of them to be blamed. They're b-both so p-pitifully young."

Diana answered in a hard voice: "Angie is nearly nineteen. I was nineteen when Chris was born. So I think of a girl that age as a woman, and Chris . . ." Color flamed into her cheeks, "Oh . . ." she gasped,

"you've given Chris no benefit of a doubt, either of you. You've already judged him."

"Haven't you?"

Giles's voice held a mingled astonishment and indulgence for her mother-blindness, and Diana saw his eyes fastening narrowly upon her. She shook her head. She could admit the possibility . . . but it was impossible. She fought believing it. Chris?

"I want better proof than the word of Angie Bush," she said harshly.

That was merely the negative of her desire. She wanted clear proof that Angie lied. She wanted her own faint doubts annihilated in certainty. Peniel and Giles had failed her. There was no comfort to be taken from either of them. . . .

Time began again with a throb, and Diana realized they had been lost in a long silence. She rose uncertainly to her feet.

"I'm going to send for Bob," she said. "I want . . . Bob."

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The doubts to which she would not own, persisted under Diana's hard composure. Occasionally, they rushed to the surface of her mind before she could gather strength to combat them. Was this tale true? Could it be true? How had Angie dared accuse Chris if it were not?

She remembered that, as children, they had liked each other. Angie had been a darling playfellow, white-skinned and golden-haired, like a fairy, a passive foil to Chris's turbulent pranks; but she had watched him, too, like a tiny mother. Diana remembered them, starting for Sunday School, Chris's fat hand held in An-

gie's. . . . Had that childish delight in each other lasted? Had Chris, with unconscious memories of Angie's easy docility, taken her up in a young stormy passion? It was possible. It was all possible. Chris was seventeen.

Whatever delight they had known was trodden into the mud. They were mired deep in their accusations and denials. How had Angie dared accuse him, if it were not true? And how had Chris dared deny the truth, if he were guilty? Diana found herself standing in her own room, her face in her hands, drawing what seemed to be the last breath in her body. Because the core of her was nothing but love for Chris, a sin of his seemed the vilest ever committed; and she cried out in despair that he must face the consequences of his own act. If a child of his was to be born, Chris must acknowledge it. For the sake of the child. For the sake of his own character which must be bred to decency. He could not shirk the responsibility of what he had done. He would have to marry Angie and give her child his name. Cheap, she was, and wanton and more to blame, perhaps, than Chris . . . oh, more to blame, Diana cried silently, more to blame . . . but these things could not matter. Only Chris mattered, Chris's life. She stood still, facing with clear knowledge, the wreck Angie Bush would make of Chris's life.

But Chris had denied everything. Why did she doubt his word? Why did this rush of misgiving bring her, again and again, to judge him and pronounce sentence? Her doubting, she thought perplexingly, had little to do with Chris himself. They reverted, irrelevantly, to someone else, to another issue. Six months ago, there was no doubt in her. She could have held her head high and cried shame on any accuser, but she was a different creature from the Diana of six months ago with

a mind so changed, so profoundly conscious of uncertainty that when she faced it she hardly knew it for her own. Doubt embittered all her existence, like a drop of gall mingled with a heady wine.

Robert came in the morning, having driven all night. Diana was asleep and only woke when she heard his footsteps on the stairs. She slipped into a negligee and went out into the hall.

"I've come, Diana." He was leaning against the sweep of the oval railing, looking incredibly dissolute and aloof, his face gray and his eyes red from lack of rest. "Did you have to send for me? I haven't slept for three nights . . . only a little while each night." He looked at her face and said quietly. "I'm not thinking very well. Chris, you say?"

She told him about Chris and watched his face whiten with anger.

"I'm sorry, Bob. I had to send for you because time is precious. Something must be done at once."

Robert swore violently.

"Sorry," he said stiffly, "this is one thing too much. On top of this campaign."

"You must sleep," Diana said gently. "This can wait until you've slept."

But he lifted his head, seeming with a shrug of his big shoulders to possess himself of composure.

"I can't sleep. I'll have a shower and we'll thrash the thing out with Chris."

All day they swung on a maelstrom of talking. Chris, Robert, Diana. They would fall silent, wearily; and in five minutes begin again. Or they would separate, thinking that everything had been said and, presently, somewhere, they would drift together.

Through the foam and eddies of their talking, Robert's position became clear. He held that Chris's in-

nocence or guilt were, alike, beside the question. No denials of Angie's assertions would make a scrap of difference. The thing to do was to hush the matter up.

"We'll bluff it through, Boy. Get young Angie out of town, at once, and Sue with her. Buy them off. Pay what it costs and forget it."

But Chris opposed him sulkily. "I'm not guilty. And I won't act as if I were."

"Have you a plan of your own?" Robert asked, sarcastically. "One, that is, which will work? Have you any idea what you want to do?"

"I want to fight," Chris said, "I want to put the whole thing on the front page of the *Journal* and deny it. I want the town to know I'm not . . . afraid."

"My God, Chris. Denial won't help you. It's boy's bravado. Every yelp you make denying Angie's accusation, will be branded a lie. Think of all the sentimental mollicoddles who'd read it and give their sympathy to the girl. The fact that you've more money than she has . . . the fact that you live in a big house and she lives in a little one with a widowed mother . . . the fact that you drive a car will prove you a liar and guilty as hell. The *Journal's* no good to you because we own the *Journal*. Every damned thing we published would be interpreted as persecution of a defenceless young girl."

Chris's eyes were cold. "I'm defenceless unless the truth is told. Don't forget that."

"It can't be told," his father said dispassionately. "A thing like this can't be brought into the light of day. You'd be . . . ruined, and for life."

Chris got to his feet and went to the window. He stood rigid, turning his back on them as he had on Angie. It was an eloquent back, big and brawny and

stiff with defiance. Diana looked at him, shaken by his desolate silence. She said breathlessly:

"The truth can't ruin anyone, Bob."

He gave her an odd glance. "It can ruin a good deal. Which Chris doesn't understand. He's too young. We have to reckon with the unspeakable vileness of ordinary minds and what can a youngster, seventeen, know about that? When I think what he'd let himself in for, fighting this, it makes me sick."

He looked at his son wistfully. There were white lines at the corners of his mouth as if, under his quiet he was strung tight. He began to speak, not impatiently at all, but with a harsh, kindly worldly wisdom.

"We're going to stick with you, Chris. Giles will see this young trull tomorrow and suggest that if she leaves town, she'll leave well-heeled. I'm going up to Chicago headquarters to night and I'll take you with me for a week or two, until we have the thing in hand here. Buying women off isn't a brave thing, doubtless . . . you don't like it and neither do I . . . but it's damned sensible, now, the discretion that's the better part of valor. What money we need to put it over quietly is here; to all I have if it takes that. When you're home Angie Bush'll be gone. You'll be better off in the end, Chris, I promise you. Don't you believe me?"

"No." A smothered, rebellious voice.

He swung about and Diana missed something in his face, the enchanted unguarded quality that had been there all his life. There was a tight pressure on his mouth, guarding him against them. He did not speak until his father had left the room. Then he sauntered toward her, his hands stuck into his pockets, rumpling up his coat; but stopped before he came very close, re-

garding her with a smile that stabbed like a knife.

"So it doesn't matter whether I'm innocent or guilty. It doesn't matter to . . . anyone."

His eyes were cold and clear. It was as if though Chris himself did not judge them, the light that his eyes conveyed revealed them as craven and hypocritical. But what hurt her more was the bitter mockery that he did not know lay in his smile.

He said stormily: "I wish I were old. And wise, so that I wouldn't feel things, like you. I should know what things mattered. Nothing does if clearing me doesn't."

"Chris . . ."

"Listen. I'm not a fool. I've talked all day and Dad's not heard one word of it, really. Can't you see what that means? It means, whatever I say, he isn't convinced; but he's going to bluff it through for me. Bluff. The real thing doesn't matter to him."

"He's trying to be kind, dear."

"I know. But he thinks it may be true. He's afraid of the truth. If it were true, I'd marry her."

"Yes. You'd have to marry her." But she knew as she spoke that she did not mean what she said. She would have gone to any length to keep Chris from marrying Angie Bush.

"So you believe it, too."

She looked up and saw that he had taken his hand from his pocket and put it against his side as though in sudden pain.

"Chris . . . No . . ." she murmured and flung out a hand to him, but he did not look at it. He looked at her face with that hard tightening of his lips.

"She lied," he said harshly. "I'll tell you something. I've never . . . touched a girl, . . . yet. I've not wanted that . . . that sort of thing; and I've stayed

straight because I thought it . . . mattered. I see it doesn't matter." And as she sprang to her feet, he cried out. "Don't come to me. Don't. For God's sake, leave me alone." He flung up his head with a gesture like Robert's and stumbled out of the room.

For a little, Diana thought tensely, she would do what he asked . . . leave him alone. He was wrought to bitterness and he would want to regain his reticence, to put the things he had said behind him. She must leave him his pride. She could imagine him, when she went to him presently, keeping withdrawn, his thoughts flowing from her like the waters of a dark river.

The thought wrung a moan from her, for in a few hours Robert would take him away. She had very little time to win Chris back. Could she ever win him back to the old confidence? They were wrong with life, somehow, all of them; they had lost hold. It was hard to put a finger on what had happened in the beginning to loosen that hold. . . . Suddenly, she realized that a long time had passed and found that she was thinking of Chris's long figure, stiff with sulky defiance, striding out of the room. She started to her feet and went swiftly up the stairs.

He did not answer her knock. There was no movement in his room and the door was locked. Diana called his name twice softly but he made no reply and she stood motionless her head bent to the door in a quick fear. After a little in the silence, she heard a sound of stifled sobbing. Only by straining her ears to listen could she hear that horrible, soft, choked sound. . . .

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The long train slid away into the darkness. The string of lighted windows slipped by, the rear lights

twinkled like green stars, it swept about a distant curve and disappeared; and when it was quite gone, Diana turned her car toward Kent Amlie's house. She went, not as she had gone once before, with a vague longing for some human touch, but deliberately because she wanted to be with Kent. For hours while she packed Chris's things and they made a stiff sort of conversation, she had been thinking of Kent.

The lamps beside his door were lighted, the shades pulled up. Through the windows, the rich dim colors of Kent's room leaped out at her, half-glowing, half-obscure. He must have heard her step on the walk for before she reached the door, he opened it.

"I have been waiting for you to come," he said quietly, standing aside to let her pass, and Diana had a quick sense of their intimacy, as if this meeting were a tryst, as if they had both known she would come to him. She said in a voice as quiet as his: "I imagine we can spare a lot of words. Do you know what has happened to us, Kent? Has Bob been here?"

"Not Bob, but Chris. He came yesterday morning, early. I drove for miles up the river with him."

While she talked with Giles and Peniel, Chris had been with Kent. She sat smiling with relief, and he said abruptly:

"I'm rather in the dark as to what has happened today. Don't tell me anything you'd rather not, Diana."

She told him everything, watching a frown gather on his face. He was plainly puzzled.

"Why did Bob take him away?"

"He thought it was . . . wiser to hush the thing up before there was scandal, before people knew Angie had named Chris. There's no proof, Kent, that he's guilty. Only Angie's word."

"Did any of you imagine Chris was guilty? Your

decent, sensitive Chris? He's too Spartan, with all his mind given to making teams. He's had clean pagan training from you. That's the standard to which you might pin the ensign of your faith, I think."

But the ensign of her faith had hung torn, fluttering in the winds of doubt. Fear, which had come from her own tenderness, had troubled her; and Giles, Peniel had troubled her.

"One does doubt," she said bravely, "how can you help it? Giles called this a dirty decade."

"But it's a decade that builds stadiums," Kent retorted, "and the greatest, as wiser men than I have pointed out, in the time of man. What youngsters have is curiosity about life and a hardness that rejects the bunk elders try to put over about themselves; but you haven't tried bunk with Chris. You've played fair."

She had no answer to that and in their silence she found herself praying helplessly . . . though she had no certainty that any God existed who would listen to her prayer . . . that Chris should not be lost to her, that he would be saved from the fate of bitterness and distrust she saw ahead. It was the reason she had come to Kent . . . (as if he could play God and answer prayers); his own indomitable desire to put through to a mastery of life had drawn her to him like a lodestone.

Kent said—and she looked up startled at his voice: "I . . . care about Chris. He's closer to me than anyone that breathes; and I can't help wondering what he will make of this. He saw no way but to fight the lie with the truth. I wish Bob had come to me today. I've found out something."

Her eyes veered questioningly to his face.

"I spent yesterday on Angie's trail," he explained simply, "to see what she was doing with her time.

She shopped all day and spent a lot of money. She is an extravagant young wastrel and in debt, always, but she never spent money like this. The question is where she got it."

"Sue."

"I don't believe it. But I should like to talk with Sue, if you'll allow me, Diana, before Bob comes back."

"If Angie would admit, once, that she had lied . . . but she won't. She won't do that."

"I suppose not," he said thoughtfully, "it's too much to expect. But we may find out something. There's always a story behind the story that's told. Scandal, now, on the very eve of the primary might serve to divert Bob's attention and make him vulnerable to attack. Even veiled aspersions would harm him. If we can find out where Angie got the money that she spent . . ."

Presently, Diana went away and, somehow, got through the night. The next day passed. And another day and another. It was on the fifth day that Sue Bush sent for her.

When she opened the door to Kent and Diana, her florid face was swollen and haggard with weeping. She ushered them into a square sitting-room where Angie was, and standing lumpishly against the door, her red arms wound in her apron, she put her daughter before them and in grief condemned her.

"I sent for you, Mis' Wayne, because I got reason to think Chris never done this. It's more like Angie t' . . . lie than him. I sent, thinkin' us three together could get the truth outa her, maybe."

Their entrance was a surprise to Angie. She retreated into a bay window and faced them, her arms akimbo, her hands on her slim hips. The gas-light, flar-

ing through a green shade, flung queer flat planes of shadow on her cheeks and eyes.

"Whyn't you try get the truth out o' Chris?" she asked insolently. "Whyn't you bring him here, tonight? He oughta be here with me. You keepin' him locked up or sumthin'?"

"This ain't for Chris, Angie. This is you an' me . . . an' Mis' Wayne. We want you should talk to us."

"What do I want to talk to you for, any o' you? You send this Giles Ennis to me to bluff me. Bluffin' and blowin', tellin' me where I get off at. What's he know about where I get off at? He can't tell *me*, what I'll do; nor you, any o' you. A lot o' snobs thinkin' your money buys folks off. Snobs, that's what you are, a lot o' smart-alecks, givin' yourself airs. I want Chris to come here. . . . Ma, she'd lie down in muck f'r you to walk on her, Mis' Wayne, but I'm diff'runt from Ma. An' I'll see she gets hers, puttin' this over on me. Ah . . . what do I talk for, to you?"

There was a pause.

"What you think you're doin'?" Angie asked shrilly. "You think you got me . . . cornered?"

She was conscious of the danger; her defiance was exaggerated, her insolence not quite natural. And she faced a man extraordinarily sensitive to emotions. The glow from the coal-stove touched the face of a Kent Amlie whom Diana had never seen, a cruel shut-trap of a face, ironic and pitiless.

He began to talk, piecing together a narrative from hints and supposition, but a plausible narrative, the account of a silly girl who had made herself a tool for stronger hands. He took a long time, pressing his points home and goading her deliberately with her own

fears. Angie sat on a straight chair, her face turned up insolently, her childish fingertips patting her elaborately marcelled hair.

"Who gave you the money you've spent this week?" he asked sharply.

"Money?" Angie glanced at him sideways, her red lips closed in a secret bow.

"If she's had money, that's all I want to know." Sue began to cry, noiselessly, wiping the tears from her cheeks with a clenched fist. "Angie is her father over again about money. It's what you get, dabbling with trash. I'm ashamed, Mis' Wayne. I want to die."

"We've been following her for four days, Sue," Kent said clearly. "We know where she has been and what she's bought: lingerie from Masters'; a fur piece at Rudd's; a wrist-watch at Cohen's. Look in her bureau and see if the things are there."

"They're there," Angie said.

"Who gave you the money for them?"

"Chris."

Through the silence that invaded them, there rose a laugh, a gay, amused little laugh as though Angie had treated them to a delicious joke. Diana . . . laughing at the idea of Chris having money.

"I guess you don't know he was here at daylight, next mornin'," Angie flung at her sullenly.

"To beg you to take back your lie," Kent said. "I saw him afterward."

"I didn't take it back."

There was another, longer pause.

Kent looked at his watch. "I asked Mr. Stafford, our lawyer, to join us here at nine o'clock. He's bringing a paper for you to sign; and several envelopes to compare with the one in which you carry your bills."

"Look here . . . who're you to give me a third

degree? D'you think I'll tell you who gave me money, if anybody gave me money?"

Kent's voice concentrated to a single metallic note.

"We don't care who gave it to you. But we'll track him down, if it's necessary. We're here to clear Chris."

"I don't have to answer no lawyer o' yours. I c'n get my own lawyer. I don't have to stay here an' answer you."

"Yes, you gotta stay, Angie," Sue said. Her eyes were like opaque blue stones. "The's no way you'll get outa here, my girl, till the truth's plain to all o' us."

And, indeed, she was trapped. Sue's chair was pushed back against the door. Behind the table where Angie had barricaded herself, the small panes of the bay window held her like the bars of a cell. Stafford rang and Sue went to let him in. Angie looked at him in a sulky silence. . . .

They goaded her into speaking at last. Their goading was cruel and went on for a long time. Unhindered by any kindness, the two men drew replies from her, not by questions but by statements, shrewd taunts; they caught her in a fantastic cross-baiting so that she had no chance for safe answers and could only choose between instinctive responses or a silence that condemned her. Angie was not clever; for all her defiance, she was suggestible and docile and had got her own way hitherto by passive resistance. She had no shield against their cruelty but clumsy defiance, no weapons but her stupid vanity and impertinences. The small room grew hot and fetid. The tormenting gibes went on. There was no promise that they would end and she began to stumble in her denials. . . .

Kent's voice struck at her when she faltered, a savage, bitter voice.

Diana missed what he said because she was watch-

ing the girl who was chalky under her rouge, and had begun to press her handkerchief against her lips and temples. "Oh, get done," Diana begged Kent silently, "Bring it to an end." For Angie seemed suddenly like a child with clear eyes and golden hair floating about her face . . . she raced with Chris down a sun-dappled stretch of grass and slowed before the goal to let him win. Chris jumped up and down at winning, and the little girl smiled at his joy. "I'm soft," she said to herself, noticing that her hands were clammy with sweat, "This is no time for softness."

She heard Angie falter: "But Chris told me to count on him. He was my . . . friend."

"You paid him out well for his friendship, didn't you?"

"It wasn't me wanted to go to Waynes'," she said sullenly, "It was Ma. She got to nagging me about . . . about things. *I* wanted to see Chris alone, by myself. But she dragged me up to the house to Mis' Wayne."

"You thought you could talk Chris into taking the blame, if you saw him alone."

Angie did not answer. Her eyes widened slowly. She raised the back of a lax hand to her throat. She looked at Diana.

As she met that look there came to his mother a certain comprehension of Angie's feeling for Chris. He still seemed close to her, her friend and playmate. The old childish affection had strengthened and her greedy vanity confused her. After she had flung his name before Sue, she had thought, fatuously, that an open accusation would make sure her ends. She had dreamed of forcing a marriage, at once, seeing Chris ingenuous and herself experienced, believing she could hold him with her passion, her tenderness. She saw

nothing beyond these expectations which ran past sanity and yet seemed reasonable to Angie. She did not understand at all what she had done to Chris. . . .

With no portent save that long look, Angie passed under the yoke.

"It wasn't Chris, Mis' Wayne," she whispered. She began to cry, mumbling his name in a dazed voice. "Not Chris . . . Chris . . . not Chris . . . never, never." She stumbled to her feet and with a slow swing of her head, she looked at Kent, "It don't matter . . . does it? . . . who gave me the money? It was a man who thought he . . . to blame. But, you see, I don't know what man was to blame. I don't . . . really . . . know."

In a vacant stillness, Diana turned her eyes aside and put her fingers tight over her lips. Through a haze she saw Sue making an identical gesture. Over their hidden mouths, the two women gazed at each other. But Stafford had pushed a sheet of paper toward Angie and casually put a pen into her hand. "You sign your name, there," he said, and she whispered, "I know . . ." . . . so that it was not until she looked up that the stillness of the older women brought her the sense of what she had said.

VIII

AT home, with Kent's voice still sounding in her ears, Diana telephoned Robert. Almost immediately his crisp level tones came over the wire.

"I suppose this prevents blackmail in the future," he said when she told him what had happened, "but I'm not sure you were wise. I'd rather have heard you'd paid the girl to leave town out of the kid's way."

Angie could hardly be considered a temptation, now, Diana answered with a sharpening of her own voice. Her retraction was in their hands. "May I speak to Chris?" she asked, feeling her heart pound at the thought of him. But he had gone to a show, Bob explained with a young reporter, a friend of Giles'. His voice was, suddenly, distant and indistinct.

"Is this all you wanted of me?" he asked.

"Will you be at home for Sunday, Bob?"

He hesitated. "I don't think so. I can't leave."

"Monday, then?"

"If I can make it. Yes," he said and rang off.

Diana replaced the receiver on the hook. "I annoyed him, calling him," she thought and her cheeks grew hot. She pressed her hands against them and closed her eyes, aware that her nerves were on edge. Projected on the screen of her eyelids was a clear picture of Chris's face, laughing at her through his lashes, but it swam too close to her and faded, and instead there was Robert's, a strange face with whose every aspect she was inexplicably familiar. She knew the outline of his head, his features, that inscrutable

expression; yet he was a stranger. She knew nothing of him. She could not talk to him. No . . . she knew far too much. It was shameful for any wife to know what she knew about her husband. . . .

For her knowledge had been her undoing. It made all her marriage unreal so that it seemed probable that from the first he had dissembled and cajoled her with lies. Nothing they had ever done had, now, any aspect of actuality. With her belief in him, Robert had taken from her, belief in herself; she was injured, despoiled of confidence. She was a different creature from the Diana Wayne who had walked proudly, a woman beloved, with the saga of life in her heart. It seemed very strange that the face reflected from her mirror was the same and that even Robert caught only glimpses of the frightened uncertain woman behind it.

She went up to her room and standing by her window, thought gravely of Robert. "If I can make it," he had said in the voice she had known always but with a different timbre, as of a man talking to a woman he barely knew and did not care to know better. And though she was growing accustomed to that timbre, Diana was not resigned to it nor could she persuade herself that the invisible abyss between them could be bridged. Rather, would it not widen and engulf them all? "I ought not to be living in his house," she thought, "I ought to go away." She was thinking almost enviously of Helene Kennedy who had come to a sharp end of loving and gone free. She had been discarded, too, but she did not have to live on in a hollow sham, the form of what had once been a reality. She had no son to hold her to a man who did not love her. . . .

A pale moon was rising, bearing the cloudy circle that betokens rain, and the stars shone dimly through

a fine mist. Someone was moving along the edge of the drive. . . . Diana leaned against the window drapery searching the darkness below and from the slow, swing of his walk, she recognized Kent Amlie, coming back for some reason, after he had started home. He did not come so far as the door. He stopped under the bare-branched maple, scanning the darkened house. Motionless and unseen, Diana watched him. It was good to see him there, to feast her eyes on his erect thin figure; and she dwelt on him affectionately, thinking that his friendliness was the most certain thing in the fretting uncertainty of her world. She waited for his ring at the bell to bring her down to him. . . . But he turned and went down the knoll more swiftly than he had come, and she was left with a clangor of his name in her mind. Kent. Kent. Kent Amlie.

She dropped to the floor with her head against the sill, praying in disconnected, inconsequent words for fortitude. It seemed a meaningless thing to do. "Why do I pray?" she said aloud vaguely, for any prayer to endure what had been given her to endure, was being answered, "I'm enduring this. What more is there?" . . . and wondered what, beyond a spurious piety, ailed her.

The knowledge came up through her mind slowly as water seeps into a newly driven well. Up and up it came, resistlessly. She put her hands before her face.

"Oh, Kent," she murmured, "my dear. I don't want this; I don't want to love you. I don't. Why has this happened? Oh Kent. Kent. My very dear."

Moments passed and she could not think at all because of the dismayed longing that filled her. The turmoil of rough emotion in her seemed somehow shameful; she wanted serenity and peace, the passionless

friendship she had given Kent so many years. She thought: "But that is gone, changed. One can't go back . . . This is love. . . ."

There was nothing in it that was like the love she had given Robert. She was, Diana thought gravely, destined to love Kent as she had not known how to love a man when she gave herself to Robert, and then went cold, divining an hour of reckoning ahead. The intensity of her feeling was unbearable. How could she face Kent, again, with this hungering passion in her heart? How could she crush it down, daily, behind the aspect of their friendship? She told herself that she was brazen, betraying her husband in her secret heart, betraying her own training and traditions; for she had been bred to the simple belief that a decent woman loved her husband and went on loving him . . . and, just as simply, she did not.

But she could not think of Robert very long. Image upon image of Kent, cut into the tablets of her memory, took on clear contours, giving her a new deep delight. She remembered him, talking in his hard young voice of what they three would wrest from life; she remembered Sunday afternoons, when Chris was a little boy and Kent had come for dinner; she remembered their long walks into the country out of Anchorage. His face, regarding her over that cup of bitter tea which he had brought her in his house. His face, after his quarrel with Bob. His face, while he was beating down Angie's insolence to get the truth that bore witness to his faith in Chris. Loving Kent was like turning through a familiar book to find a new meaning on its pages. . . .

A melting tender happiness was rolling through her and she waited, quietly, for this flooding tide to come

to the full. This was love, then. Love. She wanted to laugh wildly because it was only Kent, after all. . . .

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The leisure of the next day gave Diana time in which to examine her feelings, especially in connection with Robert. Her intentions, she was aware, must be defined before she saw him. She meant, in all events, to leave him, but only a frank discussion could settle the particulars, the orderly arrangements of their separation. That must wait until the primary was over and he, too, had leisure to consider the future. She would take Chris to some resort for the summer . . . he was going to college in the fall . . . or they could travel, leaving Robert to his absorption in the political campaign. What she comprehended clearly was that she couldn't remain in his house; in Anchorage. Their life together had broken; its substance too slight to endure the strain of existence. He had no place in her present world, no rights based on a past she had schooled herself to surrender. He was no longer real. Nothing was real but the feeling she was hiding in her heart for Kent. It was because Kent was in Anchorage that she would have to go away. . . .

The *Clarion* was lying on the hall table when Diana came down Saturday morning. Her own name, flung before her in black type, caught her eyes; and she stood still, staring down at it and wondering why her hands were shaking. They shook too much for her to pick up the paper; it had to lie spread on the table while she bent above it and battled for the meaning of the words. She knew only that they spelled disaster.

She had expected disaster, had expected it to come, like this, in some headline of the *Clarion*. For three

months, a cold fear that the story of Robert and Helene Kennedy would be told, had lain, curled like a snake, in her thoughts. But this was not the thing she feared. This was the story of Chris and Angie Bush.

Her thoughts flew to Chris before she read the column and her eyes followed the words as if she were seeing them through his. Chris would think most of the boys and girls he knew, the High school crowd. Diana thought of them. What were they saying of him, now? Would they fret, speculating as to the effect of this sorry news on his running the two-twenty in the first track meet . . . there would be no one else on the team to run the two-twenty; or would they be amused, ready to fling over him the mud of unclean young imaginings? For Chris stood, publicly, pilloried in a lie; and though they might smash the lie and free him, the shame of the pillorizing would endure.

Diana, thinking of all this, was conscious of her own secret intimacy with Chris, the delicate bond of blood and mind. She felt him, like a presence in the sunny hall, sturdy, and vibrantly alive; but she was touched by a chill expectancy. Chris would not be quite the same when she saw him in the flesh. Something would have happened to him, something significant and irrevocable, dimming his bright boyhood. And there was nothing she could do to save it.

She read without surprise, the intimation that Robert Wayne had tried to ward off a scandal by bribing to silence the girl his son had seduced. The account was misleading and derisive but there was no statement on which Diana could put a finger and say: This is a lie. It was all untrue, a distorted fantasy of surmise and rumor . . . but what had the truth to do with it? Kurt Raedel was no respecter of truth. He

was a fanatic, using unscrupulous means, any means, to gain his end. She noticed at the last, a paragraph telling how freely Angie had been spending money. . . .

The telephone was ringing in the booth under the stairs. Kent's voice came to her, explaining that he had talked with Robert on long-distance.

"We'll run a photostat of the statement Angie signed on the front page of tonight's *Journal*, Diana. Bob approves, and we'll tell the whole story." For once the paper they had striven to make utterly impersonal would turn personal; in defense of Chris they would fight rumors with the blazing spear-point of the truth.

But as she hung up the receiver, Diana had an ironic perception of the futility of the truth. It was too late to defend Chris. At best, opinion would be divided. To those, like Giles, who accepted immorality as a commonplace, Angie's signed retraction would be proof that the *Clarion's* insinuations had a basis in veracity. There might be some honest doubters, but surely only the kindest and wisest would give Chris the benefit of their doubt.

Diana knew Anchorage. She had lived for a long time so close to its heart that the strong current of its life seemed to beat in her own veins. She knew already what its response would be to this tidbit of local scandal. How eagerly people would read every word! No political news, no word of events in the far corners of the world would claim their interest like this tiny story about Chris and Angie. The *Journal* itself, through twenty years of publishing, had created that avid interest in the news of Anchorage. It had tried to be a small-town paper, serving its town.

And Anchorage was, still, a small town. For all the incessant energy that sent it sprawling in its untidy

circles over the prairie, for all its factories, its towering office buildings, its smart churches and smarter country club, it was provincial, intolerant, its worldliness a veneer. It had none of the careless indifference of larger communities where people felt sure enough of themselves to discount rigorous codes. The residue of pioneer austerity was left in its moral attitudes which were remembered publicly, however marred they might be in private observance. It lay close to prairie soil. Its mind was the composite rural mind of thousands of God-fearing folk who made religion militant, offered up prayers at Evangelical revivals and recalled the Ten Commandments while they forgot the Beatitudes; people who believed that the heart was wicked and the flesh unclean and slyly smacked their lips over the thought of a seduction. Anchorage would be shocked.

Kurt Raedel had ordered his attack with a nice perception of the time element in forming community opinion; and had allowed none for a backwash of rebuttal. It took, always, about three days to create public opinion on a local matter, and a week, if it were well-managed, to spread an idea across the country. Three days! The day of the primary would see the wave of scandalized morality at its crest; and bribery had an ugly sound. People knew that bribery went on in shady transactions between public officials, that there was fraud and graft and corruption hidden in most public issues, but, because they were well-hidden, public opinion ignored them. It concentrated only on small affairs. . . .

Well, this affair was small enough. In its entirety the scandal was only one of those incidents that cause no ripple on the moving surface of events, but sink down into some undercurrent of single lives. It was

only to the Waynes, themselves, that this would matter; and they were little folk who had some significance in their own community and none at all to the world at large, creatures so minute that the whole instant of their lives made no more stir than the glow of a fire-fly in the night's dark. Only to each other did their instant of living matter. Oh . . . but Chris mattered terribly, Diana thought, to her.

The thing that puzzled her most was where Kurt Raedel had heard of Robert's plan to buy off Angie Bush. And the question recurred to her at intervals. Would Angie herself have thought to go to him? It was hardly likely; and, she discovered, Angie had already left Anchorage. She had gone away the morning after she signed her retraction. Except for Angie there were a very few who knew the idea had been in Robert's mind. Kent and Stafford, Peniel and Giles. Who could have told it to Kurt Raedel?

* *

*

Robert came in on Monday night as they were sitting down for dinner. Looking up, Diana saw him in the hall, sent Ace for a plate for him and called out to him not to dress.

"Isn't Chris with you?" she asked in a voice that sharpened in spite of her.

"He didn't come home," he answered with curt restraint. "It seemed . . . wiser to us both that he should stay in the city. And Saturday he stepped out and got himself a job."

Diana echoed his last words.

"A very small job. Office-boy on the *News*. Ah, Diana, he's seventeen. You can run up to town, tomorrow, if you like, and see that he's all right. I'll talk

to you about this later. Just now my thoughts are grinding in my head like gear-wheels run wild." He obviously labored under difficulty in speaking. "I've slept badly with things on my mind," he said, "this move of Raedel's upset the apple-cart."

He was exhausted. The skin of his temples was stretched tight and the dark brilliance of his eyes contrasted with the lines about his mouth which were pinched like those of a man suffering pain. He looked as if he were seething with rage and keeping it controlled.

"How did this yarn about hush-money get to him?" he asked. "The fact that the young strumpet spent it like water, gives the scandal its weight. Who gave it to her?"

"The man she might have accused if she hadn't happened to think Chris would be easier game."

"It wasn't Raedel, himself, was it?"

The idea had not occurred to Diana.

"I don't think we'll ever learn who it was. You're ill, Bob. I hate seeing you like this. You have spent yourself, utterly."

"That's certainly the least I could do."

What else could he have done? Most of the money he had, and Kent's with it, he had risked on this venture. He wanted success. Under that imperturbable exterior there was, Diana guessed, a hot tumult of desire. Desire, rage, intensities controlled, beaten back. She glanced at him covertly and saw that he had turned uneasy eyes upon her.

"About Chris," he said abruptly, "he doesn't want to come back to Anchorage, yet, Diana. We've talked it over. He's going to work, this summer and go away to college, go east in the fall. He's . . . all right."

"Is he? I think I'll go up to town this week, as you

suggested." This might be the means to her own escape. Perhaps she could stay in Chicago with Chris; rent an apartment. . . . "You've really eaten nothing, Bob."

"I can't eat. I'm not hungry."

He got up from the table and went into the hall. After a little he came back restlessly, his coat on his arm.

"Have Ace unpack my bag, will you, Diana? I'm going out. I want to see Kent Amlie. There is something I want to do."

Peniel and Diana spent the evening alone. Peniel, looking more than ever like an old schoolboy, curled in a chair by the fire, engrossed in a detective story, one hand slipped between his lean knees. The lamp-light fell rosily on his delicately chiselled features and his white hair; he was content, resigned to being old, gently hilarious over his book.

Diana could not read. After a time she gave up trying and sat still, her hands folded in her lap, watching the flames that burned, blue and green above the chunks of cypress. She was thinking, simply and tenderly, of Chris. Her memory saturated with his being, recreated him: his bloomy brownness, his audacious, wilful face, the shining radiance of his eyes, behind lashes that drooped sleepily when he was excited. And she felt a flicker of alarm for him, for there was something terrifying in his superb, untried vigor.

Chris would love life . . . as Diana loved it. She had not, even now, had enough. She still wanted more: more of everything, more crisp mornings and starry nights, more deeply golden summers, more hunger and fulfilment, more of ecstasy. And she wanted all these for Chris. Her ambitions for him were illimitable and fanatic; as his were for himself. She guessed that he

had formed his intention to stay in the city, partly in the wish to seem admirable to her. He wanted to perform before her, this feat of leaping clear, out of boyishness into manhood. I wish life could be settled by doing things, she thought rather wistfully.

She had, always, met an issue by doing something and only slowly come back to find afterwards that life settled itself not by action, but secretly, furtively in moments of strange thought. What she wanted most was the sense of being entrenched with Chris in the citadel of their oneness, their understanding. "I'll go to him," she said to herself, "It is a way out of all this. I can't endure this. I must go."

She must have said it aloud, for she saw Peniel look up, blinking behind his spectacles.

He said: "D-don't you worry about Chris, Diana. Don't b-be unhappy."

But her thoughts fluttered about what had happened to Chris like moths beating out their wings in the burning pain of a candle-flame.

"M-mud-slinging doesn't matter, in the end," said Peniel, "it's p-part of the game, you know, Diana."

"It's too bad all the mud fell on Chris," she answered in a bitter voice.

As she spoke she was aware of a glare of headlights, illumining the drive beyond the glass doors; and, a minute later, of an odd stir on the terrace. Rising quietly, she went out into the hall.

The door opened and she saw a little procession coming through it. Kent came first, carrying Robert's hat, and behind him, Giles and young Dorsett, the reporter, with Robert, a heavy stumbling figure between them. The door closed and he slumped against it, panting like a dog that had been running. His voice came to her in thick gasps.

"Don't . . . look . . . like that, Diana. I'm . . . all right. All right. I fought him . . . to a finish." The word was a discordant guttural, "Raedel."

He swayed forward and Giles helped him into a chair which stood just within the door of the living-room; he sat there, spent, his eyes half-closed and glassy. But except for a slight jerking of his fingers, a slight dilating of his nostrils as he breathed he gave no sign of the suffering hidden beneath the surface.

Diana sent Ace for brandy. "And will you make some hot soup for Mr. Wayne, Ace. He's eaten nothing for hours." In the silence, she turned to Giles. "Tell me what has happened," she demanded.

But Giles did not know what had happened. It was Kent who told her while they faced each other in the study with the door closed on the hall. Only now and then, he hesitated for a phrase; yet, for all its accurate sequence, his story was not an easy narrative, and once he broke off sharply to curse Raedel in a voice as harsh as a blow on a broken iron bell.

He stood behind the winged chair, bending forward, his arms resting on its back. His face was lifted and his eyes, darkened in a shadow, pursued hers. The impressions that came to Diana, were less from Kent's words than his voice, rising from that voice in scenes illusory but complete; she heard in it an undercurrent of bitter shame, insistent and relentless, producing reality in what had been a nightmare. . . .

What first he made her understand was Robert's rage. Anger had seethed in him like lava in the cauldron of a volcano, fed by what balked hopes and knowledge of treachery no one knew. He had seemed, lately, at odds with all of them . . . had Diana noticed? But his anger had concentrated on Kurt Raedel

who had, God knows, provoked it. When he had begun talking of Raedel that evening, to Kent, his fury broke through the crust of his usual imperturbability, and poured out in a kind of destroying ecstasy . . .

Diana gathered that Kent had gone, uninvited and not greatly wanted, with Robert to find Raedel; and had helped run him to ground in the *Clarion* office. They had got nothing from him. Raedel had laughed at them.

Robert locked the door.

"We're alone," he said drily, and turning, he struck Raedel's face. An instant later, he was knocked down. Raedel, standing over him, slowly sucked in his breath, slowly took off his coat, slowly rolled up his sleeves. Kent protested but they did not listen; did not even hear his voice. Nor did they speak again.

The ensuing blow set Bob rocking. He was fighting a man who had greater skill than he, who had fought more, who was lean and wiry and cool-headed. He did not grasp this at once, however. He bore in and Raedel met him with a blow that sent him down again like a tree uprooted.

Kent struggled between them and they flung him aside. Bob, on his feet, shaking his head like a maddened animal, rushed forward in an unreasoning attack.

Kent could do nothing. Nothing. That slender body of his was useless; and the bitterness of his shame at his own helplessness beat in his voice as he spoke, with a reality more dreadful than the savagery of the men who fought. "They fought all over the place," he said. Diana had a vision of whirling struggle which held a dreadful fascination. She saw them in a fury of blows, brutal, ferocious, dominated by a sheer lust of hatred. Bob fell and staggered up and all at once

was down again with Raedel upon him, pounding, slugging, smashing. . . ."

Kent had helped Bob to the car outside. He had not dared to leave him till the pounding of his pulses eased a little; and then he went for help, finding Giles and Dorsett. "You see I did nothing, Diana; I was of no use." His mortification drew him beyond her reach, hostile to her and remote. He turned away to the closed door, opened it for her and they went out.

Ace was carrying a narrow table in to Robert's chair. A lazy warm solicitude poured from him as he moved about softly, taking Robert's shoes and bringing slippers, opening the collar on his dark thick neck.

"Heah's yo' soup, Mr. Wayne," a kindly grin split his bronze face and his teeth flashed, "betteh take yo' spoon in yo' hand."

Bob still sat stooped heavily forward. He lifted his eyes as Diana came through the door with Kent and a dull flash of feeling passed across his face like a glow of lightning after a storm. Possessed by a vague anxiety, she drew a low chair close to him, but she turned her head to follow Kent who had joined Giles at the far end of the room; and Robert chuckled drily.

"This couldn't happen again, Diana; it would be fatal. I fought Kurt Raedel. No good came of it. I suppose Kent told you that." His voice seemed to scrape against some obstruction in his throat. He shaded his eyes and her gaze fell on the curve of his mouth. An obscure agitation moved beneath its hard restraint. He seemed to be slipping into a dark pre-occupation. "Kent told you Raedel mauled me. Didn't he?" His napkin slid to the floor and stooping for it, Bob repeated the word, "Mauled . . ."

His voice broke. A heavy snuffling sound filled the room and Diana, looking down, saw his slack fingers

swaying above the crumpled linen. She sprang to push aside the table and he lunged forward, sliding to the floor with a terrible heaviness as a water-logged mass would settle down through a great depth of water.

"He has fainted," she said in a whirring voice like the singing of taut catgut. She had never before seen him inert. The enormous weight of his inertia terrified her; he had been like this for a long time, an endless time and still no one had come. She could hear hurried steps crossing the room, through what seemed an eternity. She took Robert's hand and put hers to his forehead which glistened with tiny globules of sweat.

"This is more than fainting," she asserted in that strange voice, "send for a doctor, Giles. No . . . don't lift him. Let him lie here till the doctor comes."

She sat beside him on the floor with his head on her lap. Ace brought her water and, wetting a cloth, she dabbled it at intervals over his face. A silly thing to do . . . a silly useless thing. She left off doing it and was aware that someone took the cloth from her hand. In the dragging minutes, his face, without visible change, became sunken, its resistant blankness giving her the impression of annihilation, complete and hopeless.

There was a stir beyond the door; and the doctor came in with one of the reporters from the *Journal*, dropping on his knee beside her while he took Robert's pulse. She saw him push back an eyelid with his thumb. Then, he turned a clear look upon her.

"It is a cerebral hemorrhage, Mrs. Wayne," he pronounced; and the unguarded gravity of his voice left her speechless.

"But a thing like this happens in a flash," he went on as if Diana had protested. "One moment a man seems to be in perfect health . . ." He halted with

his eyes bent on Robert's face. Kent spoke and the doctor answered, "Anger? Yes . . . of course. But I can't imagine Bob Wayne in anger. . . . It's impossible to think of him in a rage so violent as to injure the stuff of his brain." He had Giles telephone for a nurse.

There was a vague interval. The men improvised a stretcher and carried Robert up to his bed, where he lay a motionless bulk under the clothes; the nurse came; Giles went downstairs with Kent, and the house grew still. Presently, Diana sent the nurse into her room to lie down. Only Peniel would not leave and stayed with her through the night, a slight figure in a distant chair, sunk in a leaden quiet.

Diana sat immobile and silent beside Bob's bed. Her thoughts circled vaguely about his still figure, as though it were not her husband who was lying there but a stranger succored in their house. His stillness became unbearable; from second to second it seemed that it must break, that he must move and speak. But he did not move.

Except for a feeling of bewilderment, she was dull. The catastrophe was too close to her for any understanding of its proportions. A jumble of trivial thoughts stirred sluggishly in her mind, breaking, crumbling when she sought to isolate an idea. She gave up trying to think. . . .

There came to her the illusion that they were all drifting on a dark sea . . . indistinguishable specks on a surging waste, a desolate immensity swept by storm; the roar of waters was in her ears and the rush of wind. She was clinging to wreckage with a curious indifference. The hours extended into a dull infinity. . . . The dark thinned in the room and a gray outline of a window emerged in the wall before her.

Peniel materialized in the twilight, twisted grotesquely in his chair, his face hidden in the hollow of his elbow. He might have been asleep.

The nurse came in, like a white shadow and spoke to Diana. With a deep sigh, she stood up. A tremor traveled down her body as if some powerful hand had seized her and were shaking her. She could not control that shaking; swaying, uncertain, she dragged her feet across the floor and went down the stairs.

She opened the door and stepped out into the cool mystery of the dawn. Dew lay like a silver cobweb on the grass and the colors of the earth were veiled, pearly. A cold wind struck against her face. Diana stopped to tell herself that this was April . . . and that she who had loved it, was going to hate the pagan festival of wakening spring. Then she saw Kent standing beyond her, on the stone flagging of the terrace.

"It's you, Kent," she looked at him, frowning as if it were difficult to see him, "have you been waiting?"

"Did you think I'd go home?"

She shook her head, answering both his words and the other unspoken question in his eyes.

"I'm so tired, Kent," she said like a child. "It's hard to think. I can't think, clearly."

"Come and sit down. Don't bother to talk; and don't think. You don't have to, yet."

They sat down side by side on the stone bench. In the distance the mist lying in the hollows of the fields began to flush mysteriously with beauty. The world grew faintly splendid with the day. The silence stilled her confusions for a little and brought to Diana a sense of consolation, as if, near to Kent, she could lay hold on courage.

After a while she brushed her hand across her eyes.

"I think we're done for, Kent," she said.

"Not yet, Diana."

"I don't know. I don't know what we'll do." No one was quite big enough to handle living . . . Death was simpler. Death came and laid a gentle hand on some wriggling thing in pain, and the wriggling ceased. But there was no such finality in this.

"We can go on," Kent said.

His curt voice was like an iron rod strong and secure to which she could hold. He was there, her friend and Bob's, so near that she could touch his sleeve. She put out her hand and Kent met it with a steady grasp.

"There's something you'd best know, Diana. Dorsett came to me at two o'clock with news."

"News?"

"The Word went out at midnight."

"For whom?"

"Conway. He'll get the nomination."

"That doesn't matter, now."

"No."

But suddenly she put up her hands and covered her face.

IX

DIANA said: "Good morning, Margaret," to the girl at the information desk and went down the corridor and across the city room to her own office in a far corner of the building. It was unusually early. She did not have to be down so early but the rush of making up the Sunday edition lay ahead and Diana was too rusty in old ways and too unseasoned in the new to be chary of time. She had an uncomfortable feeling that Kent Amlie had found her experiments, so far, rather commonplace.

The mail was already piled on the flat desk. The room was pleasant, with windows looking down on a busy corner, with a thick carpet and comfortable chairs. The galley-proof of her leader, a chart showing the make-up for the club page and her assignment book were at her elbow. Diana ran through the heap of letters and spent five minutes fitting her more important tasks into a rough schedule.

The morning filled with a kind of concentrated drudgery: pasting in her assignment book items of future plans among the various cliques in Anchorage . . . writing heads for the buried pages of the women's section . . . the discovery that the copy for the club page had to be trimmed to yield a place for some encroaching advertising . . . calling the composing room . . . calling the copy-desk and scribbling as she talked. . . .

The turbulence of the city room full of a confusion of voices and hurrying feet, was satisfying. The four winds of the universe swept through it bearing the

echoes of a titanic symphony of events. Its wires were alive with the murmur of that music, hurrying across space; and wherever a significant chord was struck, her kind was recording it in notes of black and white. . . . The mere recording of these diapasons had a kind of beauty, Diana thought, as she turned to her typewriter. There was beauty even in the trivial news of a Society page. You wrote it very simply. It could have no trace of precious writing, only delicacy and impersonality and restraint. It took the best you could give . . . but you admitted that the results were trivial.

It was August and Diana had been back a month. She had sold the house on the knoll to Robert's banker, Casely Sneed, and moved into a small cottage next to Kent Amlie. They had reduced the debt on the paper by selling some of their holdings outright to Sneed, and arranged a long-time mortgage; and Kent had given Diana charge of Society and Women's news with full responsibility for editing her copy. She had come back to stay.

It seemed strange, after her long absence, to renew old contacts and to establish new ones with the youngsters in the plant. She had a sense that the *Journal* was bigger altogether, and more impersonal. The close intimacy she had known with Bob and Kent and which had lasted when the staff first increased, had vanished in a swifter expansion. Diana felt herself fitting into some scheme in which she occupied no extraordinary place yet which offered her an anodyne in the trifling papers littering her desk.

It was good to forget her own thoughts in the drive of work. She plunged into it vigorously each morning as into a chill deep pool and it embraced her in its harsh clasp, bitter, sharp and cold; she yielded to it;

she desired it. It was only in these hours when she worked passionately, pouring herself into a phase of her craft which to a beholder would have seemed an inane routine, that she was able to conquer the pain, hanging about the thought of Robert and of Chris. Work which was not a means to an end but an end in itself had an intense reality. Diana thought sometimes that she had never known reality, even in the drudgery she had endured long ago. There had been a young Diana Ennis adventuring with her absurd ignorance into the most difficult of crafts, audacious and unaware of her audacity . . . but was she more so than Diana Wayne, trying to make something out of the chaos her life had become?



The small house was a very quiet house.

It stood at the curve of the street, a new house with shuttered windows and a Georgian doorway, marked by a blue spruce. Behind, its narrow lawn joined with Kent's, and a herbaceous border ran along three sides. At the end, there was a drop of land to the river, whose bend the street followed and a view of fields rising beyond to a dark ridge of trees.

It was quieter than any house Diana had known. Robert and Peniel and she lived in it separate in its stillness. There was no room for Giles who accepted Kent's invitation to share his bungalow and Ace had gone to them, leaving Black Blanche with Diana. She had furnished the rooms simply with pieces selected from what she had; the heavier furniture and most of her cherished paintings, the Sneeds took over with the larger house. Diana knew her worst moment when she was moving Chris's things into her tiny guest-room,

and sitting down on the floor she cried, dreadfully and silently. Because no room in that house was to hold Chris. . . .

The money from the sale of the house, she turned toward the obligation they had laid on the *Journal*. Her own income assured them financial safety and she flung the accruing profits into that maw of debt. A mortgage of a hundred thousand would not have terrified her if Robert had been well, but under the circumstances she knew hours of galled discouragement when she wondered if all their lives might not be sacrificed in the struggle. There was an anxiety in her mind that their improvident youth had not known: fear of accident, of some unforeseen disaster that would sweep them away. She had to go on as if nothing disastrous could happen to her, regardless of her fear; but the memory of their early bondage to poverty stayed in her mind. It pleased her to live simply, to have few possessions. What she wanted was security for herself, and even more for Kent whose capital was involved with theirs; but most for Chris. Chris was to have his heritage. . . .

There was in Bob a vitality that kept him living at the edge of death; and gradually there came to Diana the belief . . . or was it hope? . . . that he would not die. When he grew better and the nurse went, Peniel cared for him. He waited on him, made his bed, brought him the meals Black Blanche cooked, and fed him patiently with an exquisite neatness. To Diana Peniel was somewhat inaccessible as all old people are, and their common struggle was carried on in a reticence broken only by necessary communion, by occasional laughter and Peniel's ridiculous little puns and limericks on the days when things went badly.

Diana wondered how she could have managed with-

out Peniel. She saw him, a slight, plucky figure giving his life as courageously as he would have flung it away in some glorious moment, but in a harder way. Grimly, gently, he helped Robert to live, knowing that it would be easier for him to die. Through their reserve, his courage reached Diana and her understanding traveled back.

Her own presence disturbed Robert, they discovered. His helplessness chagrined him and his temper was savage. She tried to have her dinner with him, at a table laid beside his bed, but Peniel pointed out that this was likely to undo the gains of the day. "It upsets him. He hates having you watch while he's fed," and Diana shut herself out, hanging about outside the door, listening to Robert's muffled voice, to Peniel answering, ministering to him and to the long silences when the only sounds were those made by Peniel moving about.

She struggled with loneliness. Eating her solitary dinners, she found herself in an isolation she had not known was possible to a human soul. When the news of Robert's collapse swept through Anchorage, people had been very kind to her and their warm-heartedness lasted for weeks; but that first intense sympathy could not endure. Goodness, Diana reminded herself, is as a morning cloud and like the early dew, it melts away. She was conscious of the dark barrier which rises, inevitably, between the happy and the unhappy, the inexplicable hostility of the light-hearted for any grief. There is a separation of the sick from ordinary people like the separation of the disgraced, of the old, of those living in shadow. The barrier, intangible and indestructible, held them apart by themselves. The swift movement of life swept past beyond it.

What marked Diana's loneliness sharply were the

silly, commonplace things: gay dinners, dances, the stir of guests in her own house to whom Robert had played host with that easy charm of which he was a little vain. These things had been the inconsequent background of her life for years; and it amazed her, now, that she missed them so much.

Missing them, she could not turn to Kent, as she would have done once. She fought with an incessant longing to be with Kent, to talk with him, to hear his voice. She could discern no change in him: the look in his dark eyes was the same, not at all the look a man's eyes have for a loved woman, opening like shining gates to let longing through. Not that. All the wisdom she had gained from living with Robert gave Diana the power to see that Kent was as he had been always. The change was in her.

She found a sharp comfort in his understanding. The crisis had encountered in him a resistant force so intense that, like Greek fire, it flamed the fiercer for the water hurled upon it. Discouragement stiffened him, but he worked hard combating it. There were days when he was irritable and sarcastic, when Diana saw as little of him as possible and would have liked to see less. She lacked the purely feminine instinct to coax and wheedle men. They always puzzled her. They seemed so much like little boys, tumbling about and getting hurt and wanting tenderness.

But Kent fell into the habit of dropping into her office after the middle of the afternoon when there was time for talk. They did not talk about the business in these intervals nor, often, of the grave things that had happened to them; they talked nonsense mostly. Kent went through his days shod with irony and sworded with satiric laughter. His haunting perception of the world's attitude toward misfortune like his had

sharpened his wits early, so that he savored vivid contrasts, the comic, heartbreaking travesty of human experience, with an edged appetite. His feast began at breakfast, with the earliest broadsides of journalistic delivery and he had the gift of picking up any newspaper and finding its most absurd, naïve line to make the day go brightly. He managed, somehow, an exuberant existence, consciously enjoyed, and he lived with concentrated energy lest some precious moment which might have yielded up a delicate emotion, should slip away into oblivion. The dance of Kent's mind led Diana's. She entered on the dangerous business of meeting his mood; she searched for things to make him laugh; she brought him her warm, curt chuckles. Both of them, man and woman, looked at a grim reality and laughed, clinging to their laughter with an obstinacy really past belief. . . .

Diana had bad hours in secret. At the plant, there was the hourly chance of seeing Kent . . . on the stairway coming down from the composing-room or downstairs among the presses, and there were moments when an unexpected glimpse of his face would make her awkward and clumsy, as wooden as an automaton. She could not avoid him and there was no use in avoiding him. When she did not see him, Kent dwelt in her mind and the more she struggled against him, against his image in her thoughts, the more, by the intensity of her resistance, he possessed her. She loved him with a tight-lipped craving that never left her. Robert was like this, she thought, I know now how he felt toward Helene Kennedy. And, at last, she came to wondering, if Kent had loved her with the passion Helene had given Robert, just how long a barren probity could have kept her faithful to her husband. But Kent did not love her. Her safety lay in that.

One night in September, she was wakened by the burr of the electric bell. She turned drowsily to the clock beside her bed and saw the hands pointing to four. Her heart began a thick heavy beating as the bell sounded again, insistently. She went down through the dark house to the door. As she laid her hand on the knob, a voice said: "It's Chris, Mother. Don't be frightened."

The door opened and he stepped across the threshold, looking slightly secret and sleepy as he always did when he was excited. He had a felt hat squashed on the back of his head and Diana chuckled briefly over seeing him as other people must, self-possessed and hard and rather too lordly. But his hardness softened as he took her in his arms and kissed her. Beyond him in the moon-blanching night, she saw a froth of flowers and the tree shadows sharply cut on the grass . . . a pale, ethereal world. Nothing in it was actual but themselves.

"Why have you come home, like this?" she whispered. But it seemed natural for him to come like that, walking in casually at an unearthly hour. He would always come home in some such fashion, she was sure; he had been born just that way.

"I quit my job last night. I've a chance to drive a car east for an old chap who's going to New York to meet his family coming from Europe. It's saved me railroad fare and gives me a week to look for something before college opens. Is there anything to eat?"

She went into the kitchen and Chris followed at her heels. The idea came to her that it might be sensible to change her floating wrap for a house-dress, but she instantly decided against it, for she wanted to sit at breakfast with Chris, looking as lovely as she could, so that he would remember her.

"I've only today," he said, "say you'll not go back to bed, Mother."

"I won't. We'll pack the day full."

She flung a blue cloth on the table and set a bowl of nasturtiums on it with an air of complete unconcern. (Wasn't there a superstition that too much mortal happiness brought down the wrath of jealous gods?) In the lighted room, Chris had a gleaming radiance that came from his run through the cold morning air. His flesh looked drenched as if he had just emerged from a dive into some energizing pool. He stopped beside her chair to kiss her again and his kiss tasted of sunlight and wind to her. She slipped slices of bread into the toaster and poured his coffee. But she could not repress a cry of exultation.

"It is so good to have you here."

He laughed across the table. "It is so good to be here. You look nice, dear." Then she saw his eyes cloud and his lips forced themselves to a leaden question. "How is Dad?"

"Better . . . I think. I don't know. You must be very quiet with him, not to excite him."

Reluctantly she turned to him a face, wavering with grief. She had not meant to tell him all that troubled her, but she was on edge with his unexpected coming and spoke out.

"I excite him," she said slowly, "I disturb him and I cannot discover why. Often, when I've been in the room only a few minutes, he's restless; and it's the same with Kent. We're bad for him."

"Don't you imagine that?"

"No. It isn't imaginary." She drew herself back and clenched her fists at the table's edge, looking at him. "There was something strange from the beginning, the first night. We have to remember that he

had lived hard for years and the campaign had sapped his reserve of strength; and earlier in the evening he had gone through a storm of anger. He . . . you're never to mention this to anyone, Chris, because no rumors of it have got out . . . he fought Kurt Raedel over that trouble . . . you . . . Angie . . ."

Chris made no response and the words knotted in her throat. This wasn't the mood she wanted for this day; but her desperation fell like a hammer on her hesitation and shattered it.

"But I've had the feeling that it wasn't that anger that struck him down. It had been over by two hours and he'd come home and was sitting in a chair, waiting for Ace to bring him some hot broth. Kent and I had been talking in the study and as we came in, he looked up and a flash of new anger went over his face . . . it was nothing else. I feel it is there, still, in a smouldering, confused resentment. And I've thought he might be resentful because we two persuaded him against his will to champion Jamie Morgan, and so turned Cretcher and Raedel against him. Nothing that has happened might have happened but for that."

But she could not go back of the Morgan incident and tell him what preceded it. No one could know of those estranged weeks nor of her feeling that in yielding his will to hers, Robert had meant to span that gulf between them with perfunctory kindnesses because he could no longer bridge it with anything else. She said abruptly:

"I may be wrong. It's all surmise. He's so chagrined at being ill; it may be only that. Kent doesn't come as often as he did."

"But you'll ask him here, today, Mother," Chris demanded, "I want to talk to him."

"Rather than your father?"

"I thought talking might bother Dad. And I've so much to say. I want to hash over the plans I've made with Kent, to have him say they're practical. I'm going in for journalism . . . I've got tangled in it for good, these six months." His lids drooped and his face took on the look of sleepiness that masked his intensities. He made a funny, stiff gesture of self-confidence. "You must know how I want my chance to play the game. You've played it for all there was in it, yourself."

"I had to play it. Needs must when the devil drives. But I have loved it, all of it."

"I think I'll be pretty fair at it," he said, "but I want to be one of the smashing best. I will be, too. You wait ten years."

Diana cried: "Ten years is no time at all." But she saw in his eyes the expression he had worn when he came home to tell her of a football victory and she sent him a triumphant glance. What had the *Journal* been created for, but this, Chris Wayne's adventure? She flung him, teasingly, one of her fragmentary texts: "Rejoice, oh young man, in thy youth. . . ."

She saw his face darken and wondered if he recalled, as she did, the bitter import of the passage; but that wasn't likely, for Chris had not been nourished up in words of faith and good doctrine quite as Diana had. He said: "Four years is so long . . . too long."

"They'll go fast. I wish you might have more to do with, my dear. I meant and your father did that you should have so much at college. . . ."

"I'll manage for myself, all right," he made again that gesture which expressed an arrogant belief in victory, "if I get a decent job I won't need much help from you. I'm going to work summers, in the east, if I can. Where I'll be on my own . . ."

Afterwards, she remembered the secret vigilance that came down over Chris's face, like a mask which he refused to unlock. Only when he was alone with her were his eyes soft and his mouth boyish. In the presence of others, he pressed his lips stubbornly together, as if he were keeping a secret before enemies.

It was Sunday and they did not leave the house. There was no urgency; the hours stretched ahead. Robert's wheeled chair was taken to the yard and Chris spent the morning, sprawled in a comfortable canvas chair beside him. Kent came in the afternoon and stayed on for the informal meal which the Waynes served on Sunday night: sandwiches, a bowl of salad, fruit and coffee. They lingered, with their coffee-cups, in the greenish twilight which left corners of jade dusk beyond the candle-lighted table. Diana was happier than she had been for months; enveloped in the security and content that she knew when these men whom she cherished, gathered under her roof.

It was, she thought, as if they had all halted in the path on which their own feet were set to look back at the Youngest Brother starting forth on his adventure. This restless, self-confident Chris pulled at her heart. Yet she guessed that his laughing bravado might cover a curiously humbled boyish pride, and that it would hide him from them until he felt himself adult. She watched him soberly, wondering how his brown face would look when he had outfaced some of the things lying ahead of him.

Kent was watching him, too.

"You'll get somewhere, Chris, I think," he said abruptly. "Of course, you ought to have printers' ink in your blood by right of inheritance. And if you learn ways of handling the tools of the craft well, these next

four years, you'll know more about it, probably, than we did after stumbling about for ten."

"Stumbling, it was," Bob echoed thickly. "Preposterous to think we came through, at all."

"But everything is preposterous. Man is a preposterous being and he has no impulse that isn't a staggering absurdity. That's the romance of living."

Giles smiled his suave downward smile. "You'll want a good deal of romance, Chris, to oil the wheels when you come back to the *Journal*. We'll seem rather small potatoes, after a city plant."

"Why do you say that?" Diana protested sharply. "Does it seem small to you, Giles? Surely you don't think that the facts of life depend on crowds for their importance. Birth and death, hunger and love and hate . . . the same experiences are found everywhere. The same craft interprets them."

"We sing the saga of the country town, persistently, Diana and I," Kent said, smiling. "Egotism, I suppose. One likes to think one's paper creates more than appears on the surface. It slips out of hand in a day, of course, its creation is an ephemeral thing; but it's a good craft, after all. One needs for it the same things one needs for art . . . sensitiveness to life, and understanding of what can be done with words, and the beauty of words and all the wisdom one can scrape together in one's mind. If you dig these things out of your books, Chris . . ."

"You may make money," said Giles. "You ought to have a bit of fun, too, getting wise. In New York."

He was going somewhere with Evelyn Painter, and Diana enjoyed the last hour the more because he had left them. Under their quiet talk, she felt their old fathomless intimacy, their sympathy and comradeship

forcing aside their reserve. Their talk was desultory, made up of fragments of sentences, terse responses, quick laughter; but it was like the conversations they had used to have and didn't, of late. But presently, she felt that Robert was growing restless. She looked at him and saw that his hand on the chair-arm was clenched. He leaned back with his eyes closed and his lips compressed,

"Are we tiring you, Bob? Would you like to go to bed?"

"No."

"I'll help you, Dad," Chris offered.

"No."

A moment of suspense followed the curt word. He opened his eyes and looked at Kent.

"It is a hard thing for a man to have everything taken from him, even his son," he said. His voice had the unsteady accent of emotion and Diana had a flashing perception of the latent resentment, confused and obscure, of which she had spoken to Chris. His displeasure accumulating in silence, vented itself in that edged tone.

She said quietly: "In four years, he'll be back. You'll have him with you on the paper, Bob."

Robert laughed drily. He turned to Peniel.

"I won't wait to see Chris off. I'll bid you good-evening, now. All of you."

When he had gone, they spent an uncomfortable quarter-hour, covering their thoughts with a discussion of trivial details . . . clothes Chris would have to buy, laundry arrangements, the frequency of his letters. Then he went, looking, as he strode down the walk, very much like the Younger Brother, off to seek his fortune, Diana thought. She watched him from the doorway, reluctant to see him go, finding it well-nigh

unbearable to lose sight of him; and looked up when he had disappeared to find Kent frowning at her.

"I'm going in to talk to Bob a minute. You better go to bed, Diana. You've had a long day."

She looked down at her hands. "Kent . . . do you find Bob strange? He is to me. I don't know him. I feel sometimes I've never known him. I cannot understand his bitterness."

"I can. I'd be bitter in Bob's place. Any man would."

He knocked at Robert's door, at the end of the hall; and after a delay Peniel opened it. A moment later he came out leaving the door ajar and Diana heard Kent's voice, in a brusque, gentle argument. "The game we're playing isn't optional. It has to be played. And decent men can devise a decent way of playing it. . . ."

The door closed, shutting her out. She could not go to them, frankly, as she would have done, once; since the day they quarreled and hid from her their reasons for quarreling, she had been aware of an interplay of secret emotions between them which she did not share. Their estrangement chilled her; the meagre inexpressive sentences were like so many puffs of dust. The mood of their evening had been spoiled.

She went to her own room and made ready for bed. The murmur of men's voices came through the floor, concise, significant, halting, resuming after periods of silence. She wished she could hear what Kent was saying, for his tones, delicate and sharp, sounded clearly above the thick mutter of Robert's. Each time Kent's voice broke a pause, her pulses pounded. The desire to see him rose in her like a tide. . . .

But with her hand on the door, she turned back across the room. If she went down now, with that turmoil of longing in her, her face would give her away; and what it would reveal was unthinkable because of

Bob. She went back as if it were a dream, to her intention to leave him. She could not leave him. He had had her first love and had still an affection with which was mingled a deep pity. Her tenderness was an honest tenderness, as real as her strange, secret love for Kent. A decent dignity held her to that secrecy, and love, unacknowledged, was not dangerous. It, too, was tenderness.

She found herself on the bed, her arms about her knees, thinking soberly that all love, at last, must come quietly and richly to tenderness. It was the end of marriage and motherhood and friendship. She felt herself touched unexpectedly with a deep tranquillity which marked the last of her attempts to resist her feeling for Kent, of believing it shameful. She could accept it as a fact of life, like work, like debt and struggle, like motherhood. A secret flowering at the heart of life. She knew she could never uproot it and she would no longer try. "I can love you, Kent Amlie," she whispered with her forehead on her knees, "I can love you deep in my heart. Always." And she sat still, thinking that she was glad they were alive in the same world, sharing its labor.

Loving Kent would quicken her, give meaning to all that happened. She had eaten of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. She was old enough to look back experimentally on herself, a romantic adventurous hoyden, putting her wits and her strength into the cause of Diana Wayne's success and finding, when she reached the summit of her desires, that she had to go on to various unreckoned and heavy ends. Like everyone, she thought, with the sharpness of an original discovery. The faces of all women wore the mark of travail. Sue Bush's face, cat's-pawed with shame and grief. Virginia Sneed's, which was hard under an expression of complacency, and Evelyn's, and the faded face of

Ralph Cretcher's wife. She saw them standing out with their grossness, their tawdry self-satisfaction, their portentous mystery, against the darkly fantastic shadow-stuff of life. . . .

The door closed below and at once, she slipped down sleepily to her pillow. Her thoughts followed Kent. A remembered benediction drifted through them: "The Lord bless thee and keep thee . . . make his face to shine upon thee . . . give thee peace . . ."

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At the beginning of the year Kent raised Giles's salary and he and Diana between them gave him a bonus, a gift of stock from their holdings.

"We want to bind you to us with hoops of steel," said Diana. "'Most men will proclaim everyone his own goodness, but a faithful man, who can find?' We're going through a precarious time and will for five years or eight, but then, if things go well, you'll have your share of the profits."

She was sentimental enough to make a little ceremony of transferring the shares of stock to Giles. After all, he was her brother and she was proud of him. He had already proved himself. As she signed the paper she flung him a tag of Matthew concerning those faithful in a few things. . . . And then, within a fortnight, a little thing happened that drained the pleasure from her memory, like water from a sieve.

The letter from the bank lay on her desk and as she lifted her eyes from it she could see Giles at the further corner of the city room. She beckoned him to come to her. He came slowly, along the aisle between the desks, smiling a little; and as he closed the door, she held the letter out to him.

"They notified me that Bob had transferred his stock because we have holdings in joint ownership. Isn't it rather odd I didn't know of it, before this, from you?"

"I don't think so. I thought Bob would tell you if he wanted you to know, and I took the chance that the bank wouldn't notify you. If it hadn't, I'd have kept my own counsel."

She was silent.

"Are you unwilling, Di? It isn't much of a gift . . . about half of one per-cent in shares. I did Bob a service and he insisted on making a return. That's all."

She thought instantly of Helene Kennedy.

"You couldn't tell me, I suppose, what the service was."

Giles laughed. "I couldn't, no. It was confidential." And he added ambiguously, "It is the nothing that my efforts came to that makes them precious."

His face held a secret amusement. Surprised, Diana found herself thinking: He will not regard any ransom; neither will he be content though thou givest many gifts . . . and wondered if she were meanly suspicious by nature. She switched on the desk lamp and looked at him with a slightly twisted smile.

"I wouldn't ask you to betray a confidence," she said, "and I know you won't betray yourself. That bland suavity of yours stands you in good stead, my lad, but I hope Chris doesn't learn it from you."

"I shall take care what Chris learns from me," Giles promised airily.

Giles was with Bob daily. He dropped in, sometimes for lunch, sometimes at the end of the afternoon, bringing reports of the paper's business and talking over his plans in the light of Robert's experience. They were in constant touch; more than Kent, Giles

acted as Robert's representative in matters which affected the *Journal*. He was the logical confidant, Diana told herself, for other, personal interests. She had no inkling what service it was that he had rendered but the suspicion that it had to do with Mrs. Kennedy stayed in her mind.

Her own hours with her husband came in the evening. She would sit in his room after dinner, reading to him or talking while she busied herself with a bit of sewing, or dropping into the long silences which had grown habitual between them, with the sense that he liked her presence in the room. The night after her conversation with Giles, she looked up in the midst of a longer silence than usual and found him looking at her with a puzzled searching expression on his face. It troubled her a little; but she knew that he would not tell her what it meant. She had tried asking him. If she probed. . . . "What are you thinking, Bob?" he would only answer, "Nothing."

She said, instead: "Bob, listen. There's something I must say to you. I want you happy. Would it make you . . . happier, to see Mrs. Kennedy?"

He lifted his heavy lids and gazed at her.

"No."

"If it would, I want you to let me send for her. I could like her. I could like having her here." She answered his look with a funny, gallant smile, "I don't care about what happened, now. I've changed."

"I know. I know you don't care, now," he said and closed his eyes.

She studied his impassive face for a long time, filled with compassion for this husband of hers who refused compassion from her as bitterly as his heavy body begged for it. She was useless to him. He was beyond her reach. His life was remote, mysterious, lived be-

hind a wall of silence. After a little he opened his eyes.

"That's over. The joke was that it was over, utterly, before you knew of it. I thought it was better to deny it; telling the truth seemed rather silly to me, and wrong. My mistake. I'd better not have lied, I expect. I shan't lie, now. It's not worth while."

"We don't have to talk of it."

"Yes, we do, once. I've thought it out . . . I've had time to think. I wanted so much. I wanted more of everything than I had and most of all a woman who would think only of me and whose life wasn't all bound into the commonplace details of mine. No . . . never mind. It wasn't your fault. I'm not blaming you. It was a kind of hunger . . . and I got some pain from it and some happiness; and was badly let down in the end. Helene did me in, and in the worst way she could think of." He paused and muttered, "But what's the use of being angry with a woman like Helene? That doesn't help. I failed you. I'm sorry I failed you; but even being sorry doesn't do any good. Things have all changed."

"It's hard to reach you, Bob."

"I know . . . we're both changed. Don't get the notion I want Helene for a moment. Even if she hadn't been treacherous and done me in, I shouldn't want her here. To see me, like this? It's bad enough to have you. . . . For God's sake, Diana, don't sit there with pity on your face. I wish you'd go away. Please . . ."

She called Peniel for him and went up to her own room. A thought was in her mind, at once demanding her attention and difficult to grasp. It wasn't what she had believed. Giles's service had nothing to do with Mrs. Kennedy.

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In the spring, with a bill for the care of dependent children, which the State Federation was sponsoring, before the legislature, Diana went to Springfield and sat through a series of dreary debates. She was planning a special feature for her Sunday section, and after filling a daily column of political notes, she gathered material in interviews with women legislators and developed copy for a dozen personality stories.

She wrote to Kent: "One likes to dream of touching great affairs, but I can't convince myself that writing political news has any aspect of greatness. The average legislator's speech on the average bill would disgrace a school boy. Hardly a half-dozen men have commanding personalities, and they run affairs. The outstanding oddity to me in legislative halls is the way the law-makers pat shoulders and scratch backs, physically as well as figuratively. Watch any two fat old birds hobnobbing over a bill and twenty to one, they have their arms about each other and their cheeks together. One wonders why."

It was at Springfield that she saw Kurt Raedel. She was seated at her table in a quiet corner of the hotel dining-room when she saw him staring at her from the doorway. He was better dressed than she had ever seen him, and she was aware of heads turning after him as he walked across the floor toward her. In any place he was conspicuous. He pulled out the chair opposite her and sat down.

"It's more than a year since I have spoken with you," he said with a brusque softness. "That night on the train . . . remember? I'm going to snatch at the opportunity while I can. I know you're not likely to make a scene in public."

Against her silence, he beckoned the waiter and gave his order.

"You're . . . as lovely as you are in my thoughts," he said, turning back. "I've a lot to say to you, Diana."

"Don't call me that," she exclaimed and flushed at her own violence. "That is a name only for my friends. I forbid you to use it."

He looked at her with his green stare. "I think of you as Diana, 'Diana, crowned with the moon.' You can't forbid that, you know."

"I shan't try."

"Must I call you, 'Mrs. Wayne?' But I can't . . . I can't say it. I think some instinct in me rebels against reminding myself you bear another man's name. Oh . . . well. It will just have to be some private name between us two. . . . What have your lovers called you? You ought to control your temper better, my lady. It's savage."

She thrust back her anger, enduring his scrutiny in silence. The waiter took her plate and brought coffee and she reconsidered her impulse to leave the table. In an odd acrid way, she was beginning to enjoy herself.

"I think it would be difficult to make you understand I haven't a lover," she said, indifferently.

"A little difficult. I'm not ignorant of women. I've known a good many."

"Too many, Don Juan; and fitted the same yardstick to all of them."

"Not . . . to you. Are you trying to make me think there's no fire under your radiance, my lady? Don't look at me with your eyes blazing. I may kiss you in spite of myself, whoever is looking. I've imagined a thousand times, kissing you again," he added reflectively.

Diana laughed.

He said: "I think we played with the word, 'friend-

ship,' once, you and I, but there's none between us nor ever will be. You're wise enough to know this stir of feeling isn't friendship. What's the use of pretending? What does a man call tumult in him, like this? Love? Passion?"

"Hatred?"

"Perhaps," he said softly, "hatred sometimes is the stormy prelude to the sweetest music. I don't mind your hating me for a little. Are you daring enough to admit you might have loved me?"

"Is that daring? I think I might have loved you in another . . . very distant . . . life."

But he took her seriously. He pushed his gaunt face forward.

"That's a half-belief I hold myself. It might be possible? Mightn't it? A man and a woman . . . you and I . . ."

"Do you go back to being mates in a jungle?" Diana asked, "or to the comparatively recent time 'when you were a King in Babylon and I was a Christian slave'? I can understand how attractive the idea of a Christian slave is to you, Mr. Raedel."

"It's true I have these perverse impulses to hurt you," he said coolly. "There is a sadistic streak in me, no doubt, and you provoke it. You think you hate me. Well . . . that makes the struggle harder, but I like struggles. Hatred in the beginning makes a sweeter surrender in the end."

"Mine isn't that sort," Diana explained in a non-committal voice. "It's just an honest hatred, quite implacable."

"And you think you have good reason for it, don't you? You haven't. I had to have my way, last spring; I was fighting for . . . something. And a man has to fight with what weapons he has. I didn't foresee the

results nor plan them. How could I? Kent Amlie and I together saw that no rumors of that fight in my office got out into the town. I did that for you, my lady."

But she thought ironically that Raedel's restraint was less kindness than indifference. He had what he wanted, that night, his ambitions were rolling forward and he could be carelessly generous, like a man drunken with power. Besides, it was unlikely he would risk condemnation as the man who had, even unwittingly, brought on Bob Wayne's collapse.

"You don't believe me. You'd like to pay me out for having hurt you."

"Not I," she chuckled as one of her jig-saw texts came to her mind, 'Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord, I will repay.' I shouldn't lift a finger, if I had the chance to hurt you."

She stood up and they looked at each other with a faint smile, a weaponed smile, flat and edged like a Roman sword.

Afterwards, of the things he had said, she remembered oftenest his statement that it had been a year since he had spoken to her. A year had passed. Two years. Three.

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In those three years changes came to Anchorage. The growth of the post-war years reached its height. It spread beyond its limits, spilling out on the fallow prairie; miles of paving were laid and buildings rose in the town, one after another, strong and delicate as steel honeycombs. Looking from her office window, Diana had a vision of towers, gilded in the windy sunlight. They had dreamed that their city should be

like this . . . but it had become greater than they dreamed and different. . . .

As had happened, fifteen years before, the problem of the *Anchorage Journal* was that of expanding to keep pace with the town. It dragged too slowly out of debt because of that necessity for development. The staff was increased; the Quad presses which had printed two hundred papers a minute were exchanged, in four years, for Octuples that doubled the output and devoured rolls of paper with incredible speed. The *Journal* was like an ungainly beast, lifting itself from a morass, slowly; and they worked with the old intensity to drive it out. The routine of work was the same: weddings, clubs, the syndicate stuff for the Woman's Page, the scramble to make up the Sunday sections. . . .

Aside from the turbulence at the plant, Diana's life was quiet. It moved in deepening grooves of tenderness, outgrowth of her earlier passion and compassion for people. It was conscious, that was all, something lucid in her mind, something willed because in it she found surcease from her own emotions. She could transmute the most tumultuous of them into tenderness. For Giles and Peniel; for Chris who was still away and whom she missed as much as ever; for Robert. She gave him stintlessly all she had to give and if he guessed that it was less than she had given him once, Diana did not know it. Only with Kent she faltered. There were days when she gave way, when she longed to go to Kent and say: "I love you. I love you, utterly. Don't you love me a little, Kent?" But she never did. There was in him that steady friendliness to hold her back and her own conviction that the truth would bring only a sterile pain to all of them. No good could come of it, not even happiness.

Keeping love secret in her heart harmed no one.

Robert Wayne grew stronger, slowly. There were even months when he seemed well and went to the plant every day; but something would happen, some little thing which seemed inadequate in itself to cause an illness, and Robert would be ill. Once it was the flu. Once in a dry summer, he was struck down with heat exhaustion and for weeks endured with a savage impatience, his wheeled chair and Peniel pottering about him. He lived his subtle remote life beyond the reach of any of them.

In May, he was ill again. He had been at the office for several months and overworked, perhaps; and the doctor advised an operation. It had been talked about before, and put off till he was stronger, but now that he was strong, it would complete the cure, the doctor said, and make him well. That was on a Friday. On Sunday night Robert went to the hospital and Diana went, early in the morning, to be with him.

He was dozing when she opened the door. He lay stretched out on the narrow bed, relaxed and comfortable, with an inscrutable composure on his face. He looked up to smile drowsily at Diana and the nurse.

"I'm sleepy," he said and yawned.

"Didn't you sleep last night, Bob?"

"Like a top. This doesn't worry me, Diana. I've seen worse than this."

The nurse stood at the foot of the bed, laughing.

"I'll leave you with Mrs. Wayne for twenty minutes. She's a better nurse than I am for you. Everything's ready."

"And the doctor's late, as usual," Robert said. "I know the man. I've waited hours on him."

He looked well, his head dark against the pillow, his

dusky skin slightly flushed. Diana walked round the bed and sat down where he could see her without moving.

"Don't try to talk if you're comfortable."

"I won't. We don't need words to understand each other. I like this." He gave her a slow smile. "You give me such . . . peace."

He lay with a still mouth and quiet eyes. His gaze held hers and his eyes darkened a little. Was he thinking as he searched her face, of a young Diana, sitting on a scarred table, swinging her heels? Of a sunny house and a brown youngster tumbling about under his mother's merry eyes? Of another woman's voice and soft, fragrant arms? A kindly serenity touched them in their silence. It was true that they did not need words. . . .

While he was in the operating-room, Diana waited in the corridor. It was full of light and long and bare, echoing her footsteps. From the high window at one end she could look down at the hospital yard where there were trees in young leaf, and a syringa brushing the wall below, its slender sprays blown from sun to shade. From the high window at the other, she looked toward the factories of Anchorage with tall chimneys above which smoke plumes stood erect and tenuous in the morning air. Window to window was sixty paces.

She counted them mechanically again and again. Occasionally, a nurse flitted past her into some pale cavern of a room, but for the most part the corridor was deserted. So that it struck her as curious when, turning at the far end, she saw four people together at the other. They stood utterly still, looking toward her as if in her they saw something which held them in an enchantment; and on them fell a bright flood of

sunlight that revealed their faces and their common quality of grave attention.

There were two doctors in white coats and the young nurse who had laughed at Robert from the foot of his bed. The fourth was Kent Amlie. He left the others and came toward her; and Diana with a quiet swiftness, went to meet him. When she came close he said, hardly louder than a whisper; "Something has happened, Diana . . ." but she lifted her hand and brushed the words aside.

She knew what had happened. It seemed to her she had known for a long time, before she saw them standing outside the door of the operating-room; and now there was no feeling of shock, but only a leaden apathy of her senses.

"He was dying this morning, when I came," she said stolidly and, lifting her eyes, she saw his lips twisting and a dark flush mounting his face.

"I don't know. I don't know what . . . happened. Nobody knows." He laid a hand on her arm and halted. "He didn't suffer, Diana. You can believe that. He had gone under the ether . . . and easily, very quickly . . ."

They stood for an instant, looking at each other.

"Will you wire Chris?" she asked at last, and turning away she went swiftly down the hall.

Sunlight fell through the windows of the room where Robert lay. They closed the door on her, leaving her alone. He was lying as he had lain that morning, as if he were asleep, she thought, for it seemed impossible that he could have died so simply. And she found herself listening for the even sound of breathing. . . .

But there was only the sunlit stillness in which all outer sounds were far-off and insignificant. She shed no tears. She knew that tears would come afterward,

when she had time to remember the past and the things that had happened. Now there were only a few brief moments, until the others came and she was caught into the ordered forms that exist to meet the strange contingency of death. He was still hers, after a fashion . . . as much as he had ever been. There had always been a part of him, secret and hidden and un-touchable. As there was of her. There were things they had never known about each other or could have known; they were solitary with secrets in their hearts beyond revealing. . . . As she looked at his dead face, it was with something like amazement that she perceived it grave and serene. He could not have fought death. He had greeted it like a friend, waiting in the darkness, patiently proffering forgetfulness of all a man desires. . . .

She would have liked to stay for a long time alone in the still, bright room. But there was a knock on the door and when she opened it, she saw a stir in the hall beyond. There was Peniel, a slight figure, white and worn. There was Giles. And Kent.

X

FAMILIAR words echoed in Diana's thoughts.

"For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. . . . For this corruptible must put on incorruptibility and this mortal must put on immortality. . . ."

The black procession was turning into the gates of the cemetery which lay on a hill overlooking the river. They went haltingly along a winding road to the further end and as her own motor came to a stop, Diana could see the first group of mourners gathering at the flower-banked grave. The plowed fields mounting beyond the river were bathed in clear soft light, for the sun was riding through a drift of clouds. A stir of returning life in the air seemed to her to give authority to the voice that began to speak.

"I am the Resurrection and the Life, saith the Lord. . . ."

Chris loomed beside her and she stole a glance at his grave bent face, but she did not reach out to him. Her own arm lay within Peniel's, drawing him close, for he had grown old in three days, as if he had come to the end of his courage. A little apart Giles and Kent stood together and behind them were the men who had borne Robert Wayne's coffin to its resting place among the heaped flowers.

"A thousand years . . . are but as yesterday . . ."

Diana hardly heard the falling phrases. She stood with her eyes on the tree-tops, thinking how little this ritual for the dead had to do with grief. It had its

note of exultation and promise, marking the futility of misunderstanding and baffled, solitary human existence. She wished she had Peniel's faith in immortality and could believe that Robert knew she had come into an understanding of what had happened. He had been the rock on which, once, she had built a citadel of faith . . . but the citadel had crumbled. Robert was dead. She was swept through by a sense of reality as if a cold wind blew upon her. Death was actual. But it was the mysterious core of life, having the essential mystery of destiny. It marked the end of estrangement and separation.

A hush followed the benediction and Chris touched her arm.

"We'll stay, Mother . . . Giles and Kent and I. You go home with grandfather."

She lifted her head and saw the group behind melting away. The purr of motors, halting, moving on, came from the road. Old Peniel was waiting for her, patiently.

It was not until the pretence of dinner was over that she went in search of Chris. She saw him standing at the far end of the yard, looking across the rolling river. The sky was beginning to bloom with sunset. The west was a wash of gold below long-cut clouds, the beams shot down evenly between violet shadows and a rich light fell on Chris's rigid figure so that he seemed to stand in an aura of dark gold. Diana stood beside him, her cheek against his hard arm, feeling herself lost to him in a timeless moment of intimacy. And he said softly:

"You're very . . . brave, Moth'. You were so close. I didn't realize . . . I took it all for granted, growing up, I mean, in a happy place. He loved you a lot."

"Yes."

Yes, he had loved her. The rapture they had known had been real. They had blundered, subject to the flaws of the flesh and lonely in spirit behind its barrier; but love had lasted them long enough since the treasure of their first young passion had filled the coffers of strength and courage for their son. Chris need never know that it was not death, but life, that separated them. She was glad, now, that when the blow fell, they had kept it a secret, hiding their estrangement and their disloyalties under the surface of their common life.

But suddenly her calm broke and she was sobbing with her face pressed to his rough sleeve. She felt his tense, steadying arm slipped about her shoulder. They stood consolingly close, consolingly aware of each other in the dusk.

* *

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Chris stayed in Anchorage for a week. He hardly left the house, wandering about aimlessly in search of diversion and suffering from boredom. Their only visitors were Giles and Kent, and the lawyer who came several times in the settlement of Robert's will.

It was a brief will, drawn up the Saturday before his death. There was the notation of a sale of five shares of *Journal* stock to Giles, the day before, and the deposit of the money; but Giles was not mentioned in the will. The house and all personal belongings were left to Diana, a provision was made for Peniel, and his holdings in the paper were divided, one-third to his wife and two-thirds to his son.

It was what Diana would have chosen, if Robert had consulted her. Except for the shares sold to Casely

Sneed just after Robert's collapse, the ownership of the paper was held by themselves and Kent Amlie. In time, their obligation would be paid off. Giles's shares would be increased as he bought more stock and the holdings transferred to Chris would bring him back. . . .

"It's only a year, now, before you'll be at home," Diana said. "I can possess my soul in patience, I suppose, for another year."

They were in the living-room on the last night of Chris's stay. He had drawn his chair close to Diana's and Giles lounged further off, beside a lamp.

After a moment's silence Chris turned.

"Would it hurt you terribly if I never came back?"

"What do you mean?"

"The *Journal* doesn't need me. You'd make a place for me, of course, but you don't need me. And it would be better for me . . . for my life . . . to be somewhere else."

"Why? Chris . . . why? This is your home."

"I hate the damned town," he said passionately. "I'm different here from what I am anywhere else on earth. You don't understand. . . . Other places, I'm happy; I've the feeling I can smash through anything, that I've a power in myself to carry me on. People like me and help me; not a man I've worked for but has given me a boost. I wangled my job on a New York paper, this summer, because of the work I've done the last two. I have friends, there. . . ."

"You have friends here."

"Not many. I've a different feeling, altogether, here. I get blue. I dread going outside the house or doing anything for myself. I've the sense of bracing my shoulders just to keep myself from slinking along the street. Oh, it's true. When I'm with people, I keep

watching their faces to see . . . to see if they're remembering . . . if they're thinking about . . . I can't talk about it. You don't understand how I feel in Anchorage."

"I do," Giles said sharply. He sauntered toward them and stood at the end of the Chesterfield, his arms folded. "I know how you must feel, Chris. There is nothing does such mischief to your mind as the hopeless struggle with scorn and disbelief."

Diana felt a swift indignation. Something Owen Morgan had said: "There's naught a man can do but go with the people against him," came back suddenly and hurt her. But Giles had no right to insinuate that it was true for Chris.

"There is no scorn for you in the town, my dear," she said earnestly. "That's nonsense."

"You'd be the last person to know it, of course, Di," Giles retorted and she saw that he was smiling.

"Whether it's true or not, I'm haunted with it," Chris said impatiently. "It changes something inside me, so I'm not myself. I feel I'm a weakling, a coward. After a few days in this town, I'm miserable. I'm . . . I'm bored with misery."

"But if you came back to stay, you'd conquer that, Chris, in a few months. You'd see how groundless your feeling is. It's your own sensitiveness that makes you think yourself a coward. Ought you to yield to it? Oughtn't you, for the sake of your own character, face a hard thing and conquer it?"

"My God, Di. I think sometimes you're the last of the Puritans, after all. Do you really believe that doing an unpleasant thing simply because it is unpleasant and will make you bitterly unhappy strengthens character? Nobody under thirty-five believes it any longer. Why should a man hold himself to a heartbreaking

struggle with the smug hypocrisy of a middle-west town, when he can use his energy forging ahead in the center of things? Chris isn't small-town stuff."

As she looked at him, it occurred to Diana that the disbelief of which Giles had spoken was his own. She had caught a hint of his skepticism, in the beginning, and even now, she felt he accepted with cynical amusement, the probability that Angie's accusation had been true. Was it Giles who kept bitterness alive in Chris?

She was growing quietly angry, so angry that she waited a little before speaking, lest she betray what she felt and spoil everything.

"I don't quite know what you mean by, 'small-town stuff,'" she said, at last, impersonally, "or by 'the center of things.' I know many people think they're done for if they aren't near masses of other people, in cities where the complexity and pressure of living gives them the sense of being in a whirl; but that isn't true. It isn't true. Place doesn't matter. The center of things exists for a man wherever he finds his future . . . where he has his work and independence and hope. In a town like Anchorage, each individual counts for several times as much as he can in Chicago or New York. Life may not be more real, but he is closer to its growth; and hope is a sturdier plant. A man . . . even a very young man . . . is more likely to be in the show and not merely a looker-on. That very thing has happened to you, Giles. Why do you deny it?"

Giles waited to light a cigarette.

"You're a small-town woman, Di. Main-streetish. I didn't quite realize how it had you; but when you begin babbling about these wide-open spaces where men are men! 'Hope a sturdier plant!' Ah, Diana . . ."

She cried angrily: "Why do you try to influence

Chris? You've made good use of your own opportunities. Why do you deride his as worthless?"

"Far be it from me to influence Chris," Giles said airily. He shrugged his shoulders and went across the room to the door. His pause on the threshold seemed to lend importance to the words he flung back. "But I wish I'd had his chance. That's all."

Chris's face was set in a stubborn hardness. It made Diana afraid. With a quick foreboding she studied its unblurred lines, the tense, rather sensuous lips, the cool, vigilant eyes watching hers. She met them with a smile that, somehow, hurt her.

"Well, Chris?"

He answered in a low voice: "I know how you feel. I know you want me to come back here."

"I can't bear to lose you. You're all I have." But she reminded herself sharply that she was taking the ancient unfair advantage of women, clinging to their children, claiming that because they gave life they should control it. And she said quietly:

"You have to decide for yourself. You have to choose your own way."

"I want to get away from Anchorage."

"Where?"

"Oh . . . anywhere. I'll find some place."

"Place doesn't matter," she repeated helplessly, "it is only that when you're climbing mountains, the other peaks look more desirable. But in most places, life is the same. Your escape happens within."

"You mean I must change. I must be a different person. I don't want to be different."

"But you will be, whether you want it or not, Chris. The thirties do it for most of us."

"Did they for you?"

She did not answer directly. "We all have to make

choices," she said rather wearily. "You make a choice when you say, 'I can't bear this'; you're trying to live in the world on your own terms. You can't do that. You have to compromise . . . and go on."

"Did you ever come to something you couldn't bear?"

"Yes."

"And compromised? And went on?"

"Yes."

"Did anything good come of it?" he asked savagely. His voice was clear and hard, silver rung on steel.

"Don't decide this, now," she begged in a low voice, "you aren't twenty-one till fall and you've a year, still, at college. Your future doesn't have to be settled, at once, for all time."

"But I don't think I'll change."

"Everything is in abeyance. Your decision means a great deal to me, more than you understand. This is your heritage, Chris, waiting for you in your own town. I've always thought of it like that, as your heritage, something that has been built for you. Don't rule it out of your life, yet. Wait . . ."

"Oh, well."

Diana sighed and rose. She did not attempt to persuade him to promise more than that but she was puzzled by the sense that some significance had escaped her; and she groped for it through hours in which groping seemed a sort of nightmare and the essential fact eluded her.

At last, she brought herself slowly to acknowledging the change in their relationship which she had resolutely ignored. Her longing to have Chris in her life held her like an enchantment. He was her son, whose flesh she had created and whom she loved with a tenderness too poignant to put into words. Through his

little boyhood they had been congenial, close; but there was no use counting on that. She struggled with the impossibility of obliterating the fact that she had doubted him. In a crisis, she had failed him and her distrust had been the first severing of the bond between them. By the time Chris was grown, and capable of forgiving her for blundering, he would be gone. Chris, her little boy who used to shout with laughter and turn cartwheels down the walk. . . . Why did women talk about the pains of birth when this worse pain of separation had to be endured after a child was grown?

Yet she could not blame Chris nor be angry with him. Only with herself. Only with life that sweeps one too suddenly from all moorings, away. They were like bits of driftwood on a strong implacable tide, and soon Chris would be swept beyond her. . . .

But it was not until the hour of his going that her courage forsook her. She looked down at his strapped bags in the hall, thinking that with him was going all the dreams that had made those years of struggle anything but futile, and broke.

"Chris," she murmured, "Chris . . . don't go away from me. Don't. Say you'll come back."

Her vehemence embarrassed him. He stood, awkward and flushed and silent. Diana put her arms about him.

"I don't mean quite that. I'm not begging you to come unless you want to. I want you to want it."

He kissed her cheek. "Maybe . . . in a year. Maybe I'll come back," he said.

She could find nothing more to say. She could only go after him to the door from where she saw Giles waiting in the car as if nothing in particular were happening. Chris got in, slamming the door after him. As the motor started, he turned back and waved. . . .

She stood in the darkness, watching the car slip off under the trees and down the long empty street in the direction of the town. She was acutely aware of the sounds and fragrances of the May night, the scent of damp earth, the stir of the wind. For a long time she could follow the car, moving like a shadow between distant lights; and then, abruptly, it was gone. There was nothing but the soft, windy darkness.

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June came with a dry heat. The nights were stifling and in the mornings, when Diana dug along the flower-border, the dew dried quickly on the grass. Downtown a fine-dust, like smoke, blew up from the streets in the baking wind. Diana's desk was covered with it. The summer's dearth of news reduced work to a kind of inertia. People began going on their vacations, and Kent, who had taken no time for himself for several years, was planning to return for the twenty-fifth reunion of his class at a small eastern college. Afterwards, he meant to have three months in Europe. The day before he left, he asked Diana to come for a last conference in his office, after the paper had gone to press.

Giles was there, when she came in, with a spread of papers lying before him at an end of the long table. She seated herself beside him and Kent drew forward his swivel chair. Nothing happened, at first, beyond the usual routine of these conferences, in which they were accustomed to discuss the current problems of management and advertising. They ran down the results of the cost system Giles had instituted six months before. They had come a long way from the days when they discarded their hand-press for the awkward af-

fair they had run with the old gas-engine; a long way, even, in the four years since they had mortgaged the paper to finance Robert Wayne's campaign. Diana understood Giles's figures and all they, significantly, proved. But she was puzzled by his silence as they went over them. His expression was secret with something cool yet tense in the curve of his lips. Presently, setting off on a tangent of their rising overhead costs, he mentioned their job-printing.

"It accounts for a quarter of the profits. That is, it has become a minor item instead of the reliance it was, fifteen years ago. It is, really, a separate organization and we'd do better to incorporate it separately, in its own plant."

"But that means another building, Giles. And presses and line-casters and stereotyping machinery. It means stretching our credit to cover a new establishment. Ought we to expand, like that, now?"

"We're hardly financial pariahs," he said lightly. "We can have all the credit we want . . . if, that is, we follow a certain course. The changes should be in the *Journal*, itself. We ought to have a high-priced man to assist Kent, better than Bailey who's been a good legman and is a mess at editing. Incompetent donkey! I'd like to get rid of him."

"And give his place to Dorsett?"

"We need a bigger man than Dorsett. The job-printing plant, incorporated, would stand on its own feet, with a good superintendent . . . I've my eye on one . . . and separate credit. Our security is good enough to swing it, for all we're pinched, at present."

Kent sat silent, his face hidden behind his hand, while Giles talked. For all the clear plan in his mind, Giles had no memorandum and Diana found it hard to follow his glib rush of figures. He was developing a

theory that the paper had grown too big to be their private enterprise.

"I don't mean that we need more loans," he said, "I mean financial help, investment. We could meet the expenses of this expansion, partly, by selling some of the stock outright, and with new capital, we'd increase our credit."

"Has the bank suggested this?"

"Not officially. It wasn't the bank, but the banker, Casely Sneed. He's the richest man in the town and he wants to buy a part-ownership in the *Journal*. Why not have him? He has been a good friend to us for years. He's seen the stock he first bought from Bob double several times, and he was willing to take more than you offered him, when he tightened things up, four years ago. Roughly, our obligations amount to a bit over a third of the whole value of the plant; you two and Chris have the controlling interest and would have, even if you sold Sneed twice the shares he owns now. I'd like to buy a tenth interest, myself, at once."

Kent spoke. "Go ahead. We want you with us for good. I'm speaking for Diana, as much as myself, I know. Can you swing it, Giles, easily?"

He was silent and Diana looked at him thoughtfully. She wondered whether Giles didn't care more for this paper of theirs than he revealed. He was a strange mixture of brilliance and shrewdness and ambition; and secretive, disclosing little of what he thought. His eyes, clear and shallow, were blank as they met hers.

"It seems the time to put the cards on the table," he said carelessly. "The suggestion isn't Casely Sneed's alone. It was he who broached the idea tentatively to me and I'm bringing it . . . tentatively . . . to you. I want it though I have to mortgage my soul to raise

the cash. The point is that the political organization has found it a disadvantage to have two papers, rivals, in a town this size. Cretcher's behind Sneed . . ."

"Then this is no more than a merger," Kent's voice was like flint. He took his hand from his face and eyed Giles uncivilly. "A merger with the *Clarion*? With Kurt Raedel?"

"Hear me out," Giles begged smoothly. "It would be a shrewd move on our part. The *Clarion* isn't as big a plant as ours but the paper cuts into circulation like the mischief. We've had to cut on space-rates with Raedel as competitor. If we consolidated, we could raise them to fifty cents an inch, in a year, and get a corresponding increase for display advertising; and we'd double the State-printing contracts. Kurt stands in with the organization. Our idea is to use his plant for the job-printing and incorporate separately. His machinery and equipment would inventory twenty-five thousand and he'll turn it over for a tenth-interest in the *Journal*. He'll be worth three of Bailey, to us."

The swiftness of his attack confused Diana. She had a sense of pressing through a thorny tangle of thoughts, making no sound until she had pushed through to the other side, apparently uninjured, though to herself she seemed torn and disfigured.

"But that is impossible," she said flatly.

"What is impossible?"

"To . . . to have Kurt Raedel, here, with us. Giles . . . how can you? How can you think of it? This is the man who slandered Chris, who was Bob's . . ." She would have said "murderer," but her lips could not frame the word. "Enemy." Her eyes hardened to a shining darkness and she put her hand over her mouth.

Giles moved impatiently.

"There's the woman of it. I rather expected something of this sort from you, Di; but you are letting your emotions undermine your judgment, entirely. The proof is wanting that Raedel slandered Chris and he was no more Bob's enemy than the necessities of the hour demanded. He may have seen the chance of a political advantage to himself, in opposing Bob; and it's not for us to blame him if he took it. Give the man credit for following the dictates of his conscience, then; and credit, now, for having outgrown a certain bigotry and fanaticism, as he has. As for the other . . . what you're thinking . . . it was pure accident. Bob provoked the attack and you have no right to carry a grudge against Kurt for results he couldn't possibly have foreseen. You've certainly no right to ask us to pass up a golden opportunity to secure the business, because you do carry that grudge. Do you women sacrifice everything to your personal emotions? It may be very feminine, but it isn't sense."

"You've missed my point," Diana said slowly. "Somehow, you've missed the meaning of what I said, and deliberately, wilfully. There's no use trying to make you see it. You want this combine. You've always wanted it."

"I've seen it as expedient. It means safety for the paper, immediately."

Kent's voice broke a pause.

"You've lost very little time. Bob's not been gone a month."

"I have a feeling," Giles answered evenly, "that if Bob were here, he'd see the combine as expedient, himself, and opportune."

Diana thought that it was very probable, but she shook her head.

"I can't agree to it," she said.

"I can't argue with prejudice. The suggestion was made, only tentatively; and nothing can be decided in the months while Kent's away. In the end, you'll decide it, I imagine, Di. Kent will submerge his own interest and refuse to have Raedel on the place if you act like this."

"Go back," Kent said, "and tell him so, Giles."

Giles gathered up his papers indifferently, an indifference edged by the small smile that twisted his mouth, but Diana felt an odd oppression as she watched him walk from the room. The door shut behind him and Kent broke the silence.

"This isn't quite the first I've heard of this. Casely Sneed gave me a hint two weeks ago that something of the sort was in the air. I have a hunch that Cretcher is piling up fortifications for a fight with the Public Utilities crowd, though I have no proof. The men who'd been with Senator Moulden in his electric-power companies and who supported Bob, haven't gone over to Cretcher. They're drawing together. There's nothing in this scheme of Giles to worry over, Diana. Let him buy his tenth interest; it will bind him a little closer to us. But we won't merge with the *Clarion*. I'm going to see Chris in New York. I think perhaps someone ought to talk to Chris."

Diana said: "I know what you mean. You'd try to argue him into coming back to the *Journal*, and to me. You'd talk to him about his duty to me; and very likely you'd touch some softness in him, so that he'd sacrifice himself because it would make me happier. But it wouldn't. I don't want sacrifice, Kent. I've seen too many clinging mothers, choking the life out of their children, piously, in the name of duty. I've known girls who poured their whole lives into succoring a healthy middle-age; and sons. I can't do it. I don't

believe in it. The younger life is the important life, always. It has rights beyond any of an older generation."

"Do you think Chris will be happier, in the end, going his own irresponsible way?"

"Yes. I think just that. If he came here, hating Anchorage, he'd be miserable, and he might lose too much battling with his misery and hatred. I want him happy, because I think of happiness as building courage. He must want to come back, before he comes. He's had a wound, deep-down, and perhaps more than one. I've thought this began before the Angie Bush affair, the night we came on Jamie and Candace, and Chris saw what human cruelty was. He thinks of Anchorage as a cruel place, different from other places; and if he came, hating it as he does, he'd dwell on its cruelties. All the little things that happen in its every-day life would keep his wound a raw sore. It might weaken him. . . . And I can't have him weakened, Kent. He's my creation. My life fails, if Chris fails, my whole existence. I've been thinking it through, since he left. I'm afraid to have him here. I wish he had the courage to come back and face all he shrinks from, but I can't give him that courage. He has to get it for himself."

"From life."

"From himself. Isn't a secret shame the deciding factor in most lives for failure or success? It may be a burden that presses a man down into the mud; but hidden away, carried into new places, it may be the driving force that lashes him on to success: the shame of a first failure that quickens the will to retrieve that failure; or the shame of being . . . undesired which throws one back on one's own strength; or a handicap that puts on a man the obligation to make superhuman

effort. . . . Why, Kent, that's you? I've learned this from you."

They sat a moment, smiling companionably at each other.

"I hope, in a year, Chris will feel differently," Diana went on. "He doesn't need to decide anything for a year . . . or three, or five. We can wait. He'll have his part-ownership in the *Journal*, all his life. Don't you go playing me up to him as a shaky old mother, who lights a nightly candle in the window for her wandering boy. When are you going, Kent?"

"On the late train, tonight."

The thought struck Diana that she would not see him for four months, and that in twenty years she had never gone four months without seeing Kent. She got to her feet, startled to find herself on the edge of begging him not to go away, but his dark contained face steadied her. "He hasn't changed, to me," she thought. "It's only I who've changed." And she said:

"I shan't see you again, then. You'll have a gorgeous trip, Kent."

"I've felt lately, as if I were tied to a wheel that spun so fast I couldn't get off," he said as they walked to the door, "I'll see Casely Sneed, tonight, before I go. I'll write you what he says. Don't worry about the business, Diana. We'll have beaten through in five years."

"I know that. Good-by, Kent."

"Good-by, Diana."

She left him and went back through the empty city-room to her own office. Kurt Raedel was alone, there, waiting for her. She saw him as she closed the door, sitting in her chair behind her desk. He did not rise and for an instant they gazed at each other, the quiz-

zical look on his face warring with the surprise on hers. She took a step toward him.

"Why have you come here?" she asked, swiftly.

"Giles told me, just now, what you'd said of me. I've come to put you straight."

"Would you have me believe that Giles told you about a private conference with us?"

"Was it so private? I'd suggested it. I was waiting in his office for your . . . reaction."

She stood still, feeling the excitement that always touched her when this man was confronting her; and after a minute, with his air of reluctantly yielded courtesy he got to his feet.

"We've a good deal to say to each other, my lady," he said softly. "You know perfectly why I want to come here, with you. You know I'm in love with you."

"No. I didn't know."

"Well, you know, now. I've loved you since . . . longer than I like to think. I loved you though I was only beginning to realize it, the night I made the mistake of kissing you without your leave; and I must have been loving you months before, and not realizing it at all. You've spoiled all other women for me; even one or two that I've remembered kindly enough. They've lost any meaning for me, since I've known you. You're my meaning. You're all I want out of life. I've never wanted anything as I want you. Do you understand what I am saying to you?"

"I can hardly pretend that I don't," said Diana. "What do you expect me to do about it?"

He crossed the room and stood close to her.

"You're not afraid of me?"

She shook her head.

"Listen. I fought this feeling for you, this . . . hunger for you. That time when I refused the merger,

it was because I couldn't come here to his paper with Bob Wayne. It would have been . . . dangerous. Because I hated him, but not for himself or anything he'd done. You must know how I felt toward him. You know me too well to have missed that."

"I know how you felt toward him."

"So I made an excuse and refused to consolidate, then. What you don't know was how I needed the money it would have brought me. I had to have money . . . and I got it, from a faction. I fought Bob Wayne through the campaign because that faction had backed my paper and had to be represented by it. What you hate is the *Clarion*, Diana. Not me. You've never hated me."

"That's sheer effrontery. You are the *Clarion*."

"A paper is separate from a man. And the moment I come here, the *Clarion* is gone . . . wiped out." He spoke vehemently but very low, "The man who made the *Clarion* is gone. I told you once there was cruelty in me. I'll admit I've had hours when I wanted to hurt you, when only hurting you would ease the tumult in me. I forgot, those hours, that you were the only thing in life that mattered to me; but I came back always to remembering it. There've been other hours when I wanted nothing but to put my face into your cool hands. . . . You're peace to me. And there is no peace anywhere on earth, for me, except with you." After a moment's silence he asked almost gently: "Why do you hold the past against me? It's over and gone. I've waited . . . all these years . . . knowing how hard they've been for you, how hard everything has been. . . ."

She stared at him without speaking. Speech was useless. The man had injured her irreparably through Chris, through Bob, but if she condemned him for it

in the bitterest words she could command, he would not know what she meant. Bob and Chris were hardly more than pasteboard puppets to him. Only he himself had reality. He had the power to wipe out the past, when he willed. She shut her eyes and opened them to find him looking at her.

"I've hurt you, somehow," he said. "I'm sorry, for I didn't mean to, this time."

"It doesn't matter."

"You think there's no tenderness in me, don't you? But there is. There is, for you. I have come to . . . to plead with you." He put up his hand and touched the red forelock on his forehead with a queer gesture, "Your servant, my lady. Let me be just that. Give me a chance to show you that I love you. Let me come where you are. Set me a term of service . . . a year, two years, to prove my loyalty. I'll not ask for anything. I'll be content just to . . . see you, every day."

"Please . . ."

He smiled and spoke softly, "Because I know I can make you love me. I've not failed yet, with a woman I wanted. And you are so much a part of me, already, that I know you as I do myself. All there is in me shall be yours and for you. I can teach you what love is, Diana."

She drew a long breath.

"I know what love is," she said.

A sudden happiness ran through her. It was good to confess the fact of loving, for once. She stood smiling dreamily at Raedel and an odd stillness spread in the room.

"You mean Kent Amlie," he said, after what seemed a long time; and staring stonily at her face he said: "So . . . that's it, is it? I've wondered what it was. I've wondered what armor made you invulnerable."

And she saw that he took satisfaction from the thought that no woman not armored by love would resist him. An impish amusement touched her and she laughed.

"Don't laugh at me," he cried savagely.

"I beg your pardon."

* *

*

The weeks slid past slowly, after Kent's departure. Diana missed him. Time had to be distilled so that each hour would seem important because it could be lost in the trivial thing she was doing. That was something that had never happened to Diana Wayne before.

In July, Giles bought his tenth-interest in the *Journal*. Diana wondered where he had borrowed the money to pay for his shares, but Giles vouchsafed no information and she did not ask. Then, late in August, he bought more stock from Casely Sneed and told her, a month later, when she would have discovered it anyway.

"Feathering my nest, as I can," he said lightly. "You don't blame me for it, Di?"

"No. If Mr. Sneed wants to sell, there's no reason why you shouldn't buy. But you're going awfully deep in debt, Giles. I confess I'm curious to know who is backing you."

He sat still, looking as bland as a young Roman prelate, his eyelids drooping. Then he lifted them and smiled at her coolly.

"I might as well tell you. It's Henry Painter. I'm going to marry Evelyn. But that is a secret, Di. You'll tell no one, not even Chris or Kent."

Her first thought was that he had let Evelyn adore him, publicly, for five years and married her only

when he found it convenient. She looked at him steadily but got no satisfaction for her scrutiny. He had come, he said, to tell her that he was leaving for New York, the next day. He wanted to settle the fall contracts for paper and supplies.

"Evelyn is going there to shop and I'm moving my trip up a fortnight on that account. We'll take in the new shows. Things are all right here."

"Yes."

"Except that we're falling down badly on the Sunday edition. I'm putting Bailey in to take charge. That all right, Di?"

It wasn't all right. It was a blow directed at herself. She tried to speak indifferently, but her face gave away her mortification.

"You called him an incompetent donkey, not so long ago."

"He'll measure up to this. Kent can change again, if he likes, when he comes back."

Old Dingle appeared at the door, scurrying inside as Giles left, like a rabbit dodging a dog.

"I wish Mr. Amlie'd come," he said when Giles was out of hearing. "Things go different when he's here. A man can work forty-eight hours on end for him, and not know he's done it."

He blinked faded eyes at her. He had been with them for years and was nearing sixty, a gray shrunken little man, in charge of the reference files, who pottered about the office briskly, as if he thought them of great importance. He laid a handful of clippings on her desk.

"I'm not complaining, you understand, Mrs. Wayne. I've been in the game for forty years and gone the circle. So long as I can earn a living, in a safe hole, out of sight, I can't complain. A paper changes. I

used to think it would mean big things for me. I know, now, I'll never do them."

She swept the clippings aside and leaning with folded arms on her desk, she sat for a long time, summing up the small incidents that had left on her mind the impression of a latent trickery in Giles. But she could put her finger on nothing untoward. Was there antagonism in his attitude? Did he attempt to overreach her in small ways? She could not be sure in a single instance that it was not all her own imagination. She was probably sensitive . . . lonely. People looking for slights, she reminded herself, usually found them.

The changes on the paper were natural enough. The older faces were vanishing and those of youngsters took their places; that happened on every newspaper. The Woman's Page which she had established . . . how many years ago? . . . was filled with syndicated stuff, not hers; the county correspondence had greater prominence than ever, but it was no longer in her department. But change had been their constant history. The paper had always changed like this. There would be a long period when their routine deceived them and they did over every day, the same work, with the same staff; and then, as if thrust forward by some long-accumulated energy, all the fibers of its organism would tighten, like the vibrant tightening in the muscles of a beast about to spring. She felt it now gathering itself to leap ahead.

Diana put her hands across her eyes. A dull discouragement took possession of her. How tired she was . . . how ragingly tired! The paper had its claws in her body, twisting her with pain. She was wondering what quality of her being had brought her to this dejection. Was she driven by a hard egotism? Was her passion for her paper, egotism? Was it the unshakable

consciousness of self such as survives in every man who sticks his career through to success, or a softer vanity? In a vague effort to rationalize her depression, she admitted that she was seeing herself in the light of Giles's critical gaze: a woman occupying a place that a man might fill better, and growing older, growing ineffective. In a few days she would be forty. Giles was weeding out men, not five years older, from the staff. He was just plunging into his own tumultuous thirties. She envied Giles. . . .

She took away her hand and looked about the room. . . . It was she who was changing. There in her office, with the turbulent commotion of the plant about her, her life had become a solitary thing which did not touch the lives of others. She missed that quickening touch; she needed closeness with people. But the *Journal* had grown too big for nearness. Sharpened by bitterness, Diana perceived the paper, too, from her brother's viewpoint: not a living entity, but a huge mechanism. . . .

Her life was in it, and Bob's and Kent's. Their wills had created it. This had been their dream, this powerful paper, growing great with its city. They could not undo what they had done. There came back to her something that Kent had said, long ago, about the god-like power of human will weaving its pattern on the surface of chaos, but the momentary buoyancy of the spirit which it brought her passed and she dropped back into dejection. Like a whisper of water in a rocky gully, Old Dingle's words ran in her mind: "I used to think it would mean big things . . . I know, now, I'll never do them. I used to think it would mean big things . . . I know, now, I'll never do them."

* *

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When Giles had been gone a week, a letter came from Chris. Coming in from an errand to the composing-room, Diana found the letter in the last mail on her desk. She picked it up and turned it over in her hands, delaying its opening. It was a long envelope, well filled. Either Chris had, uncharacteristically, written a long letter or there were enclosures. With an odd foreboding she carried it to the window and holding the envelope to the light, she tore off the end.

It was a very long letter. And it was incoherent and rambling, as if Chris did not understand very well what he felt called to explain, clearly, to her. Certain sentences, here and there, flashed out. In some of them was a touch of bitterness as if he feared her reproaches; yet it was not a bitter letter. There was a shy sweetness in it and something like humility and an extraordinary sense that his own maturity was at hand.

He had sold his share in the *Anchorage Journal* to Giles. At a good price, he insisted, a better price than he expected. Giles had dropped in the day after Chris's twenty-first birthday. . . .

Diana lowered the letter and looked out of the window with eyes that did not see very much. "As Esau who for a morsel of meat, sold his birthright," she thought and turning back dwelt on the significant sentences.

"You want me to put off deciding, but that's no use. This summer on a New York paper told me all I want to know. How can I come back to Anchorage, after New York? They've offered me a job next June. . . . I did not realize that the paper was in a bad way, nor how necessary a consolidation was. Giles hasn't worried you about it; but if selling my stock will help you,

it's an added reason. . . . There was no use wiring you, Mother. I'm twenty-one and I wanted to sell. Mr. Sneed, who happened to be here, advised me about the details. They paid me a scrupulously fair price, and the money will give me all the start I need so that I shan't need help from you, ever. I can make my own way. I can't come back to Anchorage, now."

Diana folded the letter, replaced it in its envelope and put it in her bag. She found that her thoughts were lucid. They told her that, however disastrous the fact, Chris had acted with finality. He had not turned to her, he had not thought he needed her. He was self-absorbed, like a runner starting a race, promising himself to use his body to the utmost of his strength, conscious of his strength. He meant to discover the whole aching wonder of a life he had not entered till he gave his heritage for it. Her own heart leaped and plunged for his, with his glorious certainty of life. . . .

Giles had lied. The thought of his treachery filled her with a cold, slow rage. This was the proof against him she had needed to put before Kent Amlie. She came slowly to the center of the room and stood there, her fingers pressed against her temples.

And while her outer self was thus engaged, her thoughts dwelt, practically, on the cable she was going to send to Kent. He would be at Munich, this weekend, on his way back to Paris. It was impossible to tell him what had happened in a message, and she need not make her summons too imperative. There was no need for hurry; for however overwhelming their problems seemed, they could not be settled until Kent came. The ordinary routine would have to go on. She thought with a curl of her lip that whatever happened, the paper would appear every afternoon. . . . Then she

was in the telegraph office, writing her casual message on a form. "Can you come home," and thinking a second, she added, "conveniently."

As she went out a thin rain was falling. Sharp lines were lost in it. Under the street-lamps hung circles of light ringed with mist and the shimmer of electric signs were a veiled glow. Like gold lanes, the gleam of motor lights played on the wet pavements. From the end of the bridge, Diana looked back through the misty drift of rain at the *Journal* building. A shadowy, lighted tower, lifting straight and sturdy above the rumbling traffic of the streets.

XI

GILES was moving out of Kent Amalie's house.

The van had backed to the curb just before dusk and a negro was helping Ace carry out the furniture. There were only a few pieces, handsome with masculine austerity, including a fine walnut desk and a highboy polished to tawny depths. Diana had given them to Giles when they built the house on the knoll and set a room apart for him. She saw them being lifted into the van while she sat with Peniel over a dinner of baked beans and brown bread, which Black Blanche served on Saturday nights in recognition of the Puritanic tradition. The final gesture, Diana thought, which they made toward the Puritanic tradition. . . .

Giles had come home at noon, but he had not been at the plant. She had seen him only by chance, in the Painters' car, being driven home with Evelyn for lunch. She had, she found, no wish to see Giles. But she was certain he was there in Kent's house, and when Peniel had gone, she took her coffee-cup and sat by the window, in the dusk, watching. Presently, she saw Giles come out. He stood for a moment on the broad step under the light, looking distinguished in a new coat and hat, with a hooked stick hanging from one arm. Under the other he was carrying a framed glass, carefully, and by its size and shape she recognized the Chinese map that had hung above the fireplace in her father's study. Her memory played her a queer trick, bringing her back to face a little boy across a breakfast table.

"Is he really dying?"

"I'm . . . afraid."

"I'm rather glad. Now I shall have the Chinese map for mine."

She was roused from reverie by the sound of Giles's voice in the hall, calling her name. Her answer was to switch on the lamp at the end of the Chesterfield. He came through the door and stood before her, his face wearing a tantalizing, untouchable expression. She sat quietly beside the lamp waiting for him to begin.

"I'm glad you're home, Di," he said. "I've things on my mind that I must talk over with you, very frankly."

By that she knew he meant to be evasive and crafty. She told herself she would refuse to listen . . . but that was absurd, for their thoughts must be spoken before they could go on. This was the time for talking. She managed to say quietly:

"I should have liked it better if you'd had this impulse to be frank with me, before you left. Chris wrote me . . . what you did."

He drew up a chair and sat facing her.

"Are you angry?" he asked in a pleasant voice of innocence. "If I'd been frank with you beforehand, you'd have tried to stop my little deal; and I didn't want it stopped. Chris has come of age. He could do what he chose with his own property."

"Yes."

"I played fair. I paid him a very fair price for his shares." He paused and appeared to sink into a moment of reckoning. "I'll pay you the same price for yours," he said.

She stared at him with fixed eyes. She had, quite simply, never thought of this. The paper was hers, a

burden she had shared, something that was a part of herself.

"What about Kent? Do you mean to make him an offer, too?"

He evaded that. "I mean to talk to him when he comes home."

She had the impulse to say: "He'll be here tomorrow." But she locked her lips on the words. Kent's telegram, sent from New York that morning, had cautioned her to say nothing. No one except herself knew that, already, he was on his way.

"You are wise to leave Kent's house before he learns of your treachery," she said curtly.

"Treachery? That's a harsh word and . . . if you'll forgive me . . . Victorian. You are Victorian, Sweet, like a Sunday School book. Will you never discover that the world has gone past the sentimental virtues? I'm leaving Kent's house because I can live less expensively at a good hotel and avoid Kent's irritations. A young-man-about-to-be-married should save his pennies. Surely you agree with me in that?"

"You've been spending what pennies you have rather wildly on *Journal* shares."

"More than I have, much more," he said, more simply than he said most things, "I've been planning, for ten years, to get some hold there. Did you think I meant to be an underling all my life?"

"You've not been treated like an underling by us."

Giles lifted his eyebrows in a quirk of amusement.

"Reproaches, Sweet? You'll be telling me I'm ungrateful next. Consider it said. My philosophy doesn't stress gratitude, unduly. Now that the preliminary skirmish is over, let's get down to business. You own eighteen per-cent of a plant that is worth around two-

hundred-and-forty thousand; not quite, but I'd buy your shares on that basis. That is gratitude in cash terms, my dear. And you'll keep in mind that I did as much for Chris. I'm safe-guarding your interests. You can sell out and have, with this house, enough to live on the rest of your life, without turning your white hands. You can retire gracefully. . . ."

"Into my dotage?" she interrupted sharply.

"Why should you work if you don't have to? You've earned leisure. You can play now . . . go south winters . . . travel. You'll like it."

"I shouldn't at all."

His shrug expressed his intention not to argue that; and Diana said:

"This is preposterous, Giles. You've taken over Chris's shares, not openly, not at all honorably, but we'll pass that, for a moment. Deceit has been in you, always. What advantage will you have in taking mine? We're past the worst; we'll have the paper out of debt in five years, more. You have . . . Bob's place, now."

"But I'm not like Bob," he said coolly, "I shouldn't want my wife attending directors' meetings. I shall leave her in her own pretty world and keep her out of my affairs. I don't want any woman with authority, in a business. They're good enough workers under direction, but that's all. You're forcing me to be uncomplimentary. I don't like it. I'd much prefer paying you compliments."

Diana flushed with anger. She struggled between laughter and rage, and laughed.

"I'm not so stupid that I misunderstand you. You are trying to hurt me . . . to beat me down so that I'll break and give way to your will. I've never seen you as you are, really. I let my affection blind me. That

is the thing that hurts me most, now." She altered unexpectedly, "I doubt if you understand me, Giles, but I care about this paper; it's mine. It's been my life for twenty years."

He made a pause by lighting a cigarette. The flame flared in his cupped hands and his face glowed.

"For twenty years," he echoed with a bland inflection. "It's hard to believe, looking at you. Are you so old, Sweet? And how delightfully you can blush, to be sure. Like a girl. It's becoming to you."

She did not answer that and they seemed to have come to an impasse in their conversation. After a thoughtful silence, Giles went on.

"I hope you won't be stubborn, Di. I'm making you a generous offer, more than a fair one. Generous. You can do as you please about accepting it; but if you're wise, you'll sell out . . . now."

Something ominous in the smooth casualness of his voice struck her. She saw that, incredible as it was, Giles believed what he said, that his offer was generous and that he was, really, doing more than should be expected of him. He missed the nuances of the situation which concerned her; and concerned her so much that she had hardly yet brought herself to consider its practical aspects. He was looking at her with curiosity, waiting. She sat still, gazing down at her hands which were folded on her knee.

"How will you pay me?" she asked with an attempt to be as casual as Giles, "you have plunged in rather deeply already."

"I can get the money. I paid Chris cash. I made enough on the shares I bought first to give him the benefit of their advance in price. I had to sell most of what I bought, in the first place, to do it."

"Would you care to tell me to whom you sold?"

"To Henry Painter, partly. He is making Evelyn a wedding present of a fifth-interest.

She made a swift reckoning. "A fifth. But you say 'partly.'"

"I turned over shares amounting to a tenth interest to Kurt Raedel," he said coolly. "I've bought the *Clarion* plant with them. I had to have a sail to the windward; and we are turning it into a job-printing plant."

"Subsidiary to the *Journal*?" she asked in an icy voice.

"It may be a competitor. There's the possibility of a merry little price-war in Anchorage before the first of the year. It depends on how things turn out."

Again they reached an impasse and again they remained silent. Diana felt as if she were turning, dully, in a trap. And she thought that the closing of the trap was a slow thing and that, if she were to escape from it, she must know exactly what move to make first.

She lifted her face to ask: "And my holdings will give you control? So that you can bring Kurt Raedel into the business, at last."

"God, no," Giles said impatiently, "Chris's shares gave us control. Painter and Sneed and I will vote Kurt into the business. That's all settled. We feel that it needs him. Kent is steadily getting more conservative and he has, besides, all kinds of uncomfortable little standards. They won't be so much in evidence, if Kurt's there. We mean to have Kent stay on, of course; and you will, I suppose, if you refuse to sell out to me. But the circumstances are different. We own, actually, about one and a half per-cent more of the paper than you."

For a long time, Diana sat silent, thinking.

"Does Kurt Raedel know you are making me this offer, now?"

"I haven't seen him, since I got home."

"That's not an answer to my question," she said sharply.

"No, he doesn't. I'll be frank with you," he paused with an air of delicate mockery, but Diana made no reply and he continued: "He has been planning, for a long time, to get in, by hook or crook; and been clever enough to wait and not make blunders. He gets what he wants in the long run, you'll find."

She spent a minute with the knowledge that Raedel, ignorant of the fact that Giles did not want a woman as part-owner, was counting on their companionship in the same venture. And she said hardly audibly:

"But I cannot work with him. I . . . can't."

"There is only one way to prevent it," Giles observed. He flung a little poisoned dart at her, "D'you remember the stock bonus you and Bob and Kent, each made me, in recognition of my services the first year I was manager? That's the weight that tips the balance, ever so slightly, on my side."

But Diana was thinking that if she sold out, it would be Kurt Raedel who reaped the profit of her years of work. . . .

She stood up and after moving, uncertainly, about the room, sat down at her desk. A characteristic need of summing up a situation on paper came upon her and she drew out a pad and wrote "Chris," across the top of a page. But she drew a line through his name. Chris was out of this. Some of her pride in her venture had gone with the realization that Chris would have none of it; but, in this crisis, she did not need to consider him at all. "Kent." She had no claim on Kent,

no right to burden him with her indecision. In this, their ends were separate; if he chose to throw in his lot with Giles and Kurt Raedel, she could not stop him; Kent had given her friendship and loyalty for many years, but there was no reason, in that, for casting herself upon him as a burden. This was her problem to be decided by herself, without reference to Kent. "*The Journal*." Here was the core of the situation. She wondered vaguely whether anything mattered to her more than her paper. To yield it to Giles and Kurt Raedel was like destroying something vital and alive. Then she reminded herself that it had already gone to them. The merger, so many times rejected, was an actuality. Giles and Raedel would gather in the earned increments which would increase in the years to come. Things would go smoothly with Giles in charge. Diana had the conviction that, young as he was, Giles would know how to meet any blackguard on his own ground. Perhaps, sometime, he and Kurt Raedel would coolly cut each other's throats. But that was no concern of hers. . . .

Her concern was with herself. She was being tempted to deliver the thing she had helped create to Giles, for money. To the exaggerated emotions which she was beating down under her quiet, it seemed to Diana that she covenanted its betrayal with him for thirty pieces of silver. She leaned her forehead on her hand and said in a harsh voice:

"I refuse. I refuse to sell . . . what is mine."

Giles began speaking in a soft, bland tone; and Diana realized that he was threatening her pleasantly with a prolonged struggle. They meant to stop at nothing; they cared for nothing, neither integrity or decency. She began walking restlessly about the room.

When he had finished, she turned from the farthest window.

"You warn me you aren't to be trusted?"

"Not to be trusted at all, Sweet. It's incredibly decent and generous of me to warn you. I don't know why I do. I ought to build underground, in the dark."

"As you have," she said slowly. "I am guilty, somehow, of this; I didn't know enough to make you decent. I tried to play the mother to you and I've failed."

"I shall get on," Giles answered lightly, "Eventually, I shall learn my way about the world. We'll defeat you, in a long fight. As Kurt is fond of saying, a man must use what weapons he has; his own favorite weapon is scandal," He paused and added reflectively, "There is this sinister gossip about you in the town, you know, already."

Diana pressed her shoulders against the window, her eyes startled. Impossible to believe what she had heard.

"Rumors are flying about," Giles said. "Moot questions which have never been answered to the satisfaction of the gossips. The question as to why Bob and Kent quarreled that time when Kent threatened to resign; and you persuaded him to reconsider. And that other question . . . whether Bob saw to it, himself, that he wouldn't come through his operation. . . . Has that never reached you, Di?"

She swayed and pressed locked hands to her chest where pain caught her as if the bones were crushing under an iron weight. She was racked by hoarse breathing. Surely she could not stay in this room with Giles. "But I must stay," she thought, "I must know what he means." She had been looking out of the window and when she turned back, she spoke in a perilous whisper,

"What did you say, Giles?"

"I'm saying there was a rumor in the hospital that morning that Bob took a certain drug in a certain quantity, just before the operation, while his nurse was out of the room. They found a vial, when they searched it. I thought you knew. Kent knew it. Don't say he didn't tell you because I'm sure he would. Why should he plan a trip abroad so hastily except to hush gossip?"

She was so quiet because she was nearly insensible. Groping unsteadily, she found a chair beside her and sank into its depths. Giles had turned into a cold suave devil. She could have understood quick anger, stinging words, but she could not understand this malice in him, causeless but purposeful, malignant. His curt sentences struck her like repeated blows. People thought, in the town at large, that Bob might have taken his own life in a momentary despair rather than face further illness; but he, Giles Ennis, had wondered. Bob was nearly well; he had the prospect of health after that very slight operation; and he had put his affairs in order, the day after they had decided on it. Was he weary of living because of something else? No one could say, of course, with any certainty. No one knew Bob's thoughts.

"But I knew some things," Giles said slowly, "I knew he was suspicious enough, while he was lying ill, at home, to want to know what you and Kent were doing at the plant."

She whispered Kent's name.

"Oh . . . pretence," Giles cried softly, "why do you keep it up with me? It was I who spied on you, and Bob paid me for it. You were very clever, very . . . circumspect. I couldn't carry tales back of you; but did you think your feeling was any secret? You as

much as admitted it to Raedel . . . didn't you? . . . not long ago. And Kent confessed it outright to Bob. . . ."

"The time you listened at the door?"

"They were quarreling so loudly." Giles explained. "Kent was reproaching Bob for having failed you, in some way, and one thing led to another. The truth comes out in anger. Don't think Bob didn't know how Kent felt. If he made a chivalrous exit, for Kent's sake, at the end . . . who are we to condemn him? 'Greater love hath no man . . .' I'm surprised you didn't say that first, Di, with your aptitude for quotation."

"You are telling me . . . I killed him."

"Rot. I'm doing nothing of the sort. You couldn't help what Kent gave away. Nor Kent either, I imagine. He'd lost his temper too completely, that time. You couldn't help Bob's illness, nor that jealousy and suspicion lay in his mind. . . ."

"Kent and I . . . between us . . . killed him."

"You are twisting what I've said. I didn't mean that . . ."

"If you mean anything, you mean that." She could not clearly remember all that had happened, but the thought pierced her that Robert and Kent had been estranged for six months, before she knew the truth about her own feeling for Kent. Something echoed in her mind, words of Robert's and she quoted them in a flat metallic voice: "You have no proof. There's not a scrap in existence."

Giles shrugged.

"The proof is on your face when you look at Kent. Every glance you throw him gives you away. As for Kent . . ."

He broke off short and Diana saw him draw a

shabby, leather-bound book from his pocket. He sprawled easily in the big chair, beside the lamp, ruffling through its pages. Without looking at her, he began to read:

“ ‘My darling, how can I love you like this and keep it from you? A man marred in body faces the fact that he goes through the world undesired, hateful in its sight; for women may look at him with pity but never with that lighting joy that each of them turns, in time to some other man. And you see me without pity, even, because that joy blinds you, so that I am nothing but a shadow in the background of your life. A man may penetrate, ironically, into the truth about himself, but his philosophy is of no use when he loves a woman as I love you. You are a poignant intrusion upon every day. You stand slim and fine in a doorway and every pulse in my body pounds. I watch your face, which has all the grace of a bit of Italian sculpture, and the longing comes to me to take you in my arms and see your face grow vivid with the kisses I should know how to give you . . . ’ ”

“What a thing you have done, Giles,” she said with a dreadful sadness. “A rotten thing . . . to take that book out of Kent Amlie’s house.”

“His desk,” Giles said and read on: “ ‘Today, your son was born. All day I have struggled with fear as if I were swimming in black water, underground, in a cave. I have known pain all my life and I wish I could have taken yours to my own body; it would have been easier than being torn with terror. But now that they have told me you are resting, all that is in me is envy; and envy is like ashes on a man’s head. Envy that this earth will know no son of mine. A man who begets children flows with the stream of life; and it is the only immortality he can claim with any certainty . . . some

fragment of himself, drifting down the human current . . . ' Very hot stuff, was old Kent, in his youth," Giles observed. He was hunting through the pages, but before she could speak, he continued, " 'Men talk about spiritual love as if there could be love without this hunger of the body. I love you, dear heart, in all the ways one man can love a woman. I love the gallant spirit of you, it is true; but I love you with all the fantastic agonies of jealousy and longing . . . just a human passion. One wonders how it came to be so deadly in men's minds. There must be in love as we know it, the passion of all lovers who achieved completeness, who transmitted into the stream of life, their vivid ecstasies. Those who felt no urge, or had it thwarted, died without issue . . . and in those who survived the hunger grew. No wonder it has become the ruling passion of human existence . . . ' "

She should have stopped him before this, Diana told herself. She shared a part of Giles' treachery to Kent, because she listened. But could any woman have kept from listening? The words poured over her in a healing stream, carrying away an incommunicable agony of pain. Kent had loved her. All those early years when they had fought for success, he had loved her, like this. He had kept silent.

"Here's a rich bit," Giles said, "listen. 'Yesterday, you asked me to be your friend. You asked me to take a thing which is rare between men and women and very difficult and make it real. I should have been a churl, dear heart, to refuse you, but I gave you the most impossible promise ever made. "Friendship and a quiet heart for the wise man" is reason, but an unquiet heart cannot reason about love. How does a man, touching the quick of life, evade the sting of desire? He may go out and tramp a dozen miles and sleep, at last, flung

down on a quiet haymow as I did last night. He may absorb himself in his work, so that no passion except work intrudes. Or he may drug himself with reasoning, admitting that passional surrender is not the height of human experience and that when a man makes it supreme, he cannot preserve his integrity, even in his secret soul; but must fall into the beginnings of despair. Well . . . let us reason, then. Passional surrender is not the height of human experience; and I am to make myself over into your friend. Everything demands it . . . decent loyalty to Bob, my given word to you, kindness to myself. Friendship is unselfishness, nothing more. I shall have to learn how to forget myself, because you mean more to me than myself. To give you understanding and loyalty, in return for the daily joy of seeing you, to serve you in the best ways I can, to share with you your pleasure in the common stuff of life, and keep silent. . . . Dear heart, what have you asked of me? No man on God's earth could do it.' "

Kent had done it. He had done all those things and discovered, at last, how much of love lay beyond desire. As if he had wrestled with a dark angel, saying: 'I will not let thee go unless thou bless me.' Diana quickened with emotion like a marble woman, coming to life. She was suffering, but she was exquisitely alive. Comprehension of Kent's love, masquerading under the name of friendship for twenty years, came to her, and a hot, glad pride. Giles missed comprehension. He said:

"The fool. He wrote tosh like this for years, spilling out over paper what he hadn't the guts to say. These frustrated passions linger so. But, as Kurt points out shrewdly, the significant thing about this

outpouring is that it stopped short, five years ago, as if . . ."

"Has Kurt Raedel's filthy mind played over that?"

Giles twinkled at her . . . "His passion wasn't . . . frustrated, after that. You can't keep up this comradeship stuff, forever, Di: people being men and women, as they are. I showed this to Kurt, yes. We may need it, if it comes to a bitter fight to get all we want. You and Kent would hate scandal. You haven't the modern make-up to endure it, easily, either of you; and you'd never be clever enough to dramatize an illicit affair and turn it to your own advantage. We mean to use all of this, publish it if we have to. Men fight for loot with what weapons they can find, always. And the strongest wins."

He laughed and his laughter cut the last tie that bound them. No knowledge of him, of his callousness or treachery or malice, had done to her what his mockery did in a moment. She was across the room between one breath and the next and stood there, contemptuously, holding open the door. . . .

When he had gone out, she flung herself face down on the couch. Her head was buried in her arms and her body shaken with long shudderings, with silent, dreadful weeping. After a long time, it stopped and she lay quiet. . . .

Slowly, as she became conscious of her own body, lying there, she had a curious illusion of insubstantiality and lightness as if she were floating just under the surface of clear greenish water. Peace touched her. She felt tranquil, released from the grief and shame that had raged through her after that humiliating scene with Giles. Thoughts and emotions mingled in her mind, none of them very clear; but, she thought, if she

could keep calm like this long enough, she could think things through. She stretched one arm straight above her head, feeling the muscles stiffen and her flesh tingle with a stir of life, as if she were coming out of an enchantment.

Presently she sat up and looked around the room where a forest of tall shadows stood up about the pools of lamplight. She had to face defeat. She could give it no other name and she measured it by the certainty with which her enemy had broken down the gates of the stronghold. Already, Kurt Raedel was within the walls. . . .

But the stronghold was not yet surrendered. The struggle could go on to the bitterest ends, hand to hand within its walls. Excitement touched her while she sat, turning over in her mind the details of a prolonged struggle, holding her thoughts steadily upon its dangers. Her imagination fastened on the hope of victory. But she rejected it. "There is nothing certain," was all she could think. Something cold and dry had breathed through Giles's threats and to Diana's sharpened perceptions it was the coldness of his callousness, the dryness of his determination. Giles, more than Raedel, was her enemy. . . .

In the ruthless struggle these men meant to force upon them, Kent might be exhausted. He was frail stuff to cope with Giles and Kurt Raedel. Diana would be useless to him. His strength, rather, would be spent in defending her, protecting her rights. And their paper would be weakened by their dissensions, like a fortress ravaged and laid waste. Even, if, after a long combat, she and Kent regained control, she would be helpless, if Kent were spent. She could not handle the *Journal*, alone. She wasn't big enough. She tasted the knowledge, like bitter aloes on her tongue.

Yet, she faced it. It had to be faced; she had to see herself as she was, without illusions. Her thoughts went back to the early years, remembering poverty and strain and weariness. She had worked hard. She had put drudgery and indefatigable effort to their venture, paying for what successes she was to have in advance. Successes? But her dreams had come true. They had gone on, building a great paper, growing as its city grew. Now, it had grown beyond her. She was, when everything was said, a small-town woman.

The part of wisdom would be to sell. She would only injure Kent Amlie, if she stayed. Once she was out of the plant, he could hold his own with Giles and Raedel; and in time they would adapt themselves to each other. It was she about whom the struggle centered. Giles was her enemy because she was a woman; and Kurt Raedel threatened her with his implacable will, his ruthless intentions. . . . She could not work with Kurt Raedel. "I must sell," she said thoughtfully, aloud, "There is nothing else I can do."

But the thought brought her only pain. She stiffened to endure the realization which crashed, suddenly, upon her, that she had learned to live without Bob, that she had schooled herself to let Chris go his own way in the world, after the queer fashion of men-children, but she could not face life without work of her own. She could bear hardship, could keep on until a fatigued body could be trusted to fall at once into deep sleeping; she had an ironical sense of her own powers of endurance and none whatever of her acceptance of idleness. The passion for a printing-press was in her, an oddly insatiate passion, she thought. And she was not yet forty. "I may live thirty years," came to her mind with the thin clarity of an echo. "How can I live? . . . How can I?" How did one live, doing

nothing? When things crashed, like this, how did one set about it to build something out of the broken fragments?

The sense of house walls about her grew unbearable and she opened the door and went out. The moon was setting in a milky sky and, as she walked along the street away from the town, she caught glimpses beyond the dusky houses, of the moving river, a drab, limpid solitude. She skirted the golf course and mounted the hill beyond, past the house which she and Robert had built. It rose, steep-pitched, dark, under the maples; and Diana stopped still, her hand at her throat, thinking of Robert. . . .

There was a reasoning, clear-brained Diana who granted her absolution for what had happened to Robert; it told her that his death had followed from his illness, from the impact of tiny blows which had made up their unhappiness; and their unhappiness had followed from a change of feeling that neither of them had willed. It had come against their wills. They could not help changing. . . .

She had a disturbing recognition of the incalculable forces shaping human lives; but a moment later the thought came to her that it was not Bob's faithlessness, but her own, which had, finally, separated them. It was her secret love for Kent. It had been like a seed underground pushing up through the soil, growing up in spite of them. Tiny, slight, its green shoots appeared, pushing them apart. They had refused to recognize it, they had not even known its name until it had grown so great that they were hidden from each other by it. And then, suddenly, it blossomed with its strange froth of flowers. . . .

And a stern, implacable Diana, the Diana who had known sorrow and shame and pain, refused her absolu-

tion; it gave her up to a remorse that would outlast life. She could only half-believe that Bob had taken his own life, as Giles suggested; and the more she considered it the less she believed. But it was possible. She had, blindly, blunderingly, made it a possibility. Only she was to blame.

Robert had never loved her as Kent Amlie had loved her. Theirs had been a sweet, wild passion, almost wholly of the senses. Bob would never have kept silence, hungering, desirous but loyal to the friendship between himself and a man who possessed what he desired. And with Robert who had possessed it, love had not lasted; it had died of its own fulfilment. It had gone from him irrevocably, leaving him dissatisfied. . . .

And it had gone from Diana. She had turned to Kent. What she felt for him was not young love; it was a hunger and tenderness that lay beyond desiring. How did one explain this mutation of desire into spiritual love? Why should hunger of the body flower into tenderness of the spirit? Was it because, as one grew older, the unrealized longing of the flesh turned inward and clothed a loved one in the flame-color of denied love? That which is sought and not found becomes the more exquisite by not finding it; and desire which dies by fulfilment, is made richer by denial.

When she reached the top of the hill, Diana turned aside into the thick grass under a cluster of trees. The deep silence of the night was unbroken. Below her, the open fields spread flatly in monotonous grays and the lights of the town made a faint radiance, far-off, on the dark.

Unwarned, she found herself facing the certainty that nothing mattered but Kent. The paper, all the slowly built structure of her life did not matter, . . .

Ah, that's not true," she said aloud. Her life did matter, but Kent mattered more. If it would make one thing easier for Kent, she must yield all she had to Giles and go away, knowing exactly to what savorless existence she committed herself. Kent loved the *Journal* as she loved it; and Diana was the only person alive who knew quite how much that was. Remembrances of what they had shared and the premonition of loneliness to come, brought her to a sharp longing for Kent. She ached with wanting him. . . . But she had no certainty that he needed any tenderness of hers or wanted it, by now. He had stopped pouring out his emotions on paper, years ago. Had the cool friendliness for which he had fought resolutely, become reality? Had he gone past love before she came to comprehend it?

She thought it very likely. Facing the grayness of those still fields, Kent seemed far away beyond the loneliness that surrounded her. He stood alone, courageous and indomitable. He had learned to stand alone, in those illusive years that had run like sand, between their fingers. She could, she thought, have made love beautiful for him, for she knew the ways which made him queer to other people and her arms ached for him; but Kent had the strength to do without her. It was she who needed him. She, it was, who had followed him while he opened gates for her and with his strength had drawn her to his own level. He had given her what he had of fortitude. He had belonged to her in spirit, always. She felt humble when she thought of him. . . .

She slipped down, her face on her arm, and the palms of her hands pressed against the earth. An hour passed, two hours while she lay there. She felt oddly at peace. So much pain had been wrung from her that she had no strength for any more, only strength for

love, for her gathering powers. For she had to go on. Only in her own completeness lay a hope of safety. Even completeness seemed trivial, however necessary. She saw herself as an infinitesimal thing, one of a plethora of tiny beings coating a whirling, careless world like dust.

Young Diana Wayne had loved life. She had run eagerly to meet it, quite unprepared for it as it was, her eyes caught by far horizons which touched her imagination with their seeming beauty. She was, simply, a very ordinary woman. And like all women, she thought, she had lived in her youth very much in her senses, a little in her mind and only occasionally in her soul. The conquest of the mind had given her knowledge of her senses, of her own powers and limitations; but to falter after that conquest, to stand still, was to be swept aside by the years to come. Only when a woman begins to live in the soul, does she truly know how to live; but the life of the soul is rarely an early victory, it becomes an achievement of experience, a precious gift from Time. Diana thought: "I shall learn, yet, how rich life is," and felt her heart beating with expectation.

The future was hers. It lay within herself to make of it what she wished. And she wished so much. She wanted to make something satisfactory out of the interval before the swift bright dance of earth swept on without her. She wanted to come close to life itself, deep down where she could find the old flavor. She wanted people . . . and work.

The darkness was taking back its veils. In the east, day was breaking and the dawn was flooded with pale grays. The land showed, immaculate and shining, in the faintly growing light. Getting stiffly to her feet, Diana stood a moment, stretching her arms to the

fugitive wind. A rare minute came and went while she stood, growing conscious of a rapture in her different from anything she had known. How many moments like this were left to her? Perhaps not many . . . but that was not true, she knew. What held her was the certainty that life could blossom into an incredible beauty. . . .

XII

KENT'S voice on the telephone.

"I'm home, Diana. My train's just in. May I come over?"

She threw a glance across her shoulder into the living-room where she had a feeling that Giles was still sitting, bright and baleful, the emanation of his suave mockeries hanging in the air.

"I'd rather come to you, Kent," she said, "I'd rather talk to you in your own house."

"When will you come?"

"In an hour?"

"Must you wait so long?"

But she wanted a little time to examine her intentions. They should be clear, she felt, by the time she faced Kent, and beyond the fact that she meant to leave the *Journal*, she had no plans. There was only the finality of that surrender.

She slipped out toward six o'clock while Peniel was dozing on the sofa. The narrow yard, as she crossed it, was drenched with sunlight and the river, below, was pale with a bright silvered blueness. Kent's door stood open and his shabby, brilliantly labeled bags were heaped in the hall. He got up from the chair in which he had been waiting and came toward her. He looked rested, his olive skin warmed by a stir of blood, his dark eyes clear. Hot weather suits him, Diana thought; but he looked like the boy he had been, intolerably dear.

She said simply: "It's good to have you back, Kent."

They stood together, their hands clasped, smiling at each other.

"Ace tells me Giles has gone away, to the hotel."

She nodded. "Yesterday."

"What has happened, Diana? I tried, just now, to get him on the phone, but he was out."

"He's at Painters', perhaps," she answered idly.

"He's going to marry Evelyn Painter next month."

"Was that why you cabled me to come home?"

"Kent . . ." she said in a low voice, "I have so much to say to you . . . and I don't know how to begin." She did not look at him but she saw his dark gaze was turned toward her, faintly smiling, waiting. The truth came. "I'm selling my shares in the paper to Giles. I am going away from Anchorage, for a while."

He grew rigid, staring at her. Then he went the length of the room, turning to look out of the wide window. He spoke quickly and softly.

"Tell me why you're doing this. Tell me."

She told him first how Giles had gone to Chris and how Chris, reckoning no consequences to anyone except himself, had yielded up his inheritance to Giles's control. She sketched the juggling of holdings in the hands of Casely Sneed, and the way in which they had brought Kurt Raedel within the walls of the stronghold. She spoke of his threat of a long struggle ahead, but she did not mention the book which Giles had taken from Kent's house. He might have put those emotions too far behind him to bear the recollection of them, easily. It was the sort of thing, anyway, a decent woman didn't mention. . . .

"So that is what has happened," she ended, "they struck in our weakest moment, and they have control. I don't see that we could have prevented it. It doesn't

affect you; but I had to make a choice. . . ." She put her hand against her face, looking away from him as she tried to tell him her difficult thoughts, "I have to leave the plant, or work, every day, beside Kurt Raedel; and I will not work with Kurt Raedel. It is womanish, I know, to put a personal feeling above one's work, to sacrifice a reality to an emotion; but I can't help it. I will not stay in the plant after he comes to it."

"But you can't go. I can't let you go." He was coming toward her, in a curious haste. "Diana, what would the paper be to me, without you?"

She had stumbled to her feet; and as he came she put out her hands, gropingly, for his. Kent's arms received her. Time stood still for a moment while there came to them a deep ecstasy which shut out everything; the fear of years flashing past, swirling away the loveliness of life like leaves on a wind, left Diana. She felt the tightening pressure of Kent's arms and his breath in a sigh against her lips.

They moved together to the couch and sat, smiling at each other quietly and kindly. After a long pause, Kent said:

"I've waited so long, for this; I've wanted you . . . so long. Ever since that morning you came to the office, the first time I saw you. I can shut my eyes any moment in a day and see you with your lovely shining eyes and the flush on your cheeks. You made me think of a pine-tree with sea-wind blowing through it. We have been as near as that from the first, haven't we?"

"So near, Kent." She lifted her head from his shoulder to look at him. Her face was like the face of a grave, radiant girl; and he bent forward, put his hand against her throat and, very gently, kissed her.

"I love you," he whispered. "Let me look at you.

Every step I've found myself turning to look at you. I've wanted to share with you everything that happened. We've had long practice in being friends, Diana . . . practicing the art of friendship. It's a fine art and you taught me all I know about it." He was giving himself up slowly to the joy of her, to the joy of loving her. He said, muffled and gay: "Most affairs begin with a kiss and end with a handclasp, but a few . . . a rare few . . . begin with a handclasp and end with a kiss. I wish you'd tell me when you found this out, Diana."

"That night at Sue's. You . . . your faith in Chris. . . ."

"So long ago as that? But even if I'd guessed how you felt we could not have spoken. We'd have had to keep silence. . . . Oh, silence has taken too much from us. We'll never yield to it again. We can say, 'I love you,' forty times a day."

"I love you," said Diana, in a voice that was soft and amused and rather dangerous.

"Are you sure? Dear heart, are you sure you want me?" He wanted to be told that she would be content with him the rest of her life, that she was a lover who could never be made bitter by what she found in him, "I'm irritable . . . cantankerous. You know the bad things about me . . . and you don't care?"

"I don't care. I know you're stronger than I . . . strong and fine and splendid. More splendid than you know, yourself. I love you. I'd throw the world and the stars away for you, Kent. Do I love you enough?"

Her voice was quiet but she was trembling with happiness. Her fingers crept up under his cuff, clinging to his arm.

"I'm a part of you," she said, after a little, "I don't care about leaving the *Journal*, if I can stay in your

house, with you. Though what I'll do without a printing-press, I don't quite know."

"You shan't do without it. I want you working with me . . . I love you because you can get excited about things and laugh and cheer as men do . . . I don't want you a domestic woman, without shop-talk. But not as you have worked, not work that drains your energy and leaves you exhausted. We won't work like that, nothing like that, ever again. . . ."

He was silent, sitting lost in contemplation beside her. The sun draining from the room left it wan with twilight and outside, in the dusk, she saw a cloud of moths, fluttering over Kent's phlox.

"Cretcher is fighting the public utilities crowd," he said with an irrelevancy that startled her.

Diana chuckled curtly. "Have you been thinking about Cretcher all this time? What a romantic you are, Kent."

"I've been thinking about the paper and what we'll do. I had a hint of this, last spring; but I thought it would be a year, or even two years, coming to a head, and in two years we'd have had the paper in a condition where we could have sold for better money than we're likely to get now. Cretcher is the boy who's financing Giles. He's wanted this combine for five years. . . . Tell me again all you can remember of what Giles said."

She told him carefully, and he jotted down notes and figures as she talked.

"Giles hasn't told Henry Painter that this is a move of Cretcher against the Utilities crowd; but that's what it is. He's strengthening his defences; it's possible Giles doesn't know that. A new group has grown up in the last three years, men who were Moulden's backers when he owned the electric inter-

urban railways and who split with Ralph Cretcher and stood with Bob, the year he ran for office. They control the utilities; and they've already begun buying a string of down-state papers. They need them through this territory. Cretcher's battling them and he's tried to get the *Journal* first, through Giles."

"He has it," Diana said drily, "don't you realize that, Kent? He controls a little more than half the stock and we control a little less."

"You haven't listened to what I said. I'll repeat: Giles hasn't told Painter that Cretcher is fighting the Utilities. Either he doesn't know it, or he's so blinded by ambition that he has double-crossed one man too many. He'll not control Painter's shares nor Casely Sneed's when they know the truth. They own too much in the down-state gas companies and Painter had an interest in the electric lines, like Moulden. They'd stick with the Utilities against the devil himself. . . . Does Giles know I'm home?"

"I did not tell him you were coming."

"I haven't come, then. I'll take the late train to Chicago, tonight. The Utilities want a string of papers . . . and it's just possible I can get a better offer for your holdings, and mine, than Giles made you. We'll have to sell, Diana. One crowd or another will get their hands on the *Journal* eventually. We'll have to let it go . . . and try not to care who has it nor what they do with it when it's gone. But I believe, if I can see the right men tomorrow, I can put through a deal that will let us slip out and leave Giles and Raedel holding the bag. I may fail but it's worth trying. You can put Giles off for a few days, can't you? I'm not supposed to be in Anchorage for a fortnight, and I may have to use the whole time to adjust matters. Can you play for

time about selling out, for a few days, and go through each of them as if nothing had happened?"

She drew herself away to look at him. A foreboding sense of conflict chilled her.

"I'm stupid, Kent. I don't really understand . . . I don't want you to sacrifice yourself for me; or think of me at all. Think of yourself."

"I can't think of myself without thinking of you. I can only think of us, together. What I mean is a very simple thing. I mean to sell our shares in the paper to the Utilities crowd for the best price I can get. I've known for a year, they were likely to make us an offer and add the *Journal* to their string of papers. I shall tell them the truth frankly and leave it to them to put the screws on Sneed and Painter. They will. They'll have control, not Giles, nor Cretcher."

"And when we've sold our paper, what will you do, Kent? Come back and run it for its owners?"

"I . . . don't think so. I'd not do well as a Yes-man, I'm afraid. I want my own plant." He got up and walked to the door, he turned the key in the lock. "We'll not have any light. Till my train goes, we'll stay together. I don't want anyone to learn I'm here, tonight."

The last of the light had gone from the window and Kent's face glimmered in the clear greenish dusk. He came back to the end of the couch and flung an arm about her shoulder, drawing her close. They sat silent while the darkness blotted out the sense of confining walls.

Kent came out of a prolonged reverie. "D'you know what I'd like to do best?"

"What would you like to do, my dear?" Diana asked as if she were speaking to a little boy.

"I'd like to start over again, somewhere. Down south . . . it's becoming obvious that in ten years or so, I'll need a softer climate, winters . . . in a little town. We could buy a small paper, a country weekly, maybe, and build it up. It would be like going back and being young again, with you."

It developed that something of the sort had been in his mind before. National progress, he believed, would set its next step south. To the America of the future, the importance of that great fallow territory was beginning to be visible. It had been left behind in a sort of pocket while pioneers swept on to develop the west. There were reasons in plenty why the south had lagged while the country advanced elsewhere, but the retarding influences were almost over: the civil war was over and plantation living; with immigration laws what they were it was filling with a homogeneous population from the north rather than with newcomers, unfamiliar with its ways; industrial projects were going in, factories were building.

"Somewhere in the country around Birmingham," said Kent. "A town of three-four thousand, something that's more than just a wide place in the road, but a little town, with good farming country around it. A good, up-to-date country weekly is about our stride. The country paper isn't the gamble, with the odds all against the editor, that it used to be. At that, it won't be like taking candy from a baby. I'm a skeptical old type-louse when I think about making any easy money. No money's easy. We'll have to work hard and plow the first profits back into the paper; but it isn't as if we didn't know the business or how to hustle for news and advertising. I make a guess we'll be earning fifteen per-cent on the investment in three years. We'll stuff the sheet so full of local news that everybody in the

territory will have to read it. We'll make a specialty of advertising display for the local merchants. We'll write reams about how many acres of muck land each farmer has under cultivation and how many crates of tomatoes were shipped in the last week, and who's bought a new flivver or painted his barn. It's our game, dear; and the most wonderful game in the world. You're hunting an impossible that you know will elude you forever, but you live close to people. It's going to be fun," he exulted.

"You're . . . dear," Diana told him. "But we're giving up all we've fought for. Don't you care at all, Kent?"

"Do you?"

She knew she did. It amazed her that he was turning ahead, giving his mind to the future, without a backward look of regret. Men would always be a little queer to Diana. The cleverest and strongest of them had this tumultuous eagerness like little boys. . . .

"I think I'll have regrets. I've given this too much, all I had to give. My life has put down roots in Anchorage. I shall be homesick for it and you will, Kent."

"I know . . . but I've seen a lot of men come and go and not one made much of a hole. No one makes much of a hole. We aren't important, Diana. We're so insignificant, we can do as we please. Nothing makes any difference to me, if I have you. You're all I want. I can do without anything but you." At that he took her again, suddenly, into his arms. Diana's face was turned up under his and their lips touched and were pressed together in a long kiss. . . .

There had been a girl who loved Robert Wayne the first time she laid eyes on him. The kisses she had given him were light and lovely as the brush of a moth's wing. But this she gave to Kent was a woman's kiss,

charged with knowledge and deep tenderness, and pride. The paper didn't matter. . . .

They came apart with eyes widely opened, looking at each other.

Kent spoke first. "You have given me so much, all that I've never had and only dreamed of having."

"We'll have . . . what you've dreamed. Somewhere, we'll find it."

"Yes. We're through in Anchorage. Our work's finished. And of all the wastes in this divine wanton of a world the most pitiful is that of keeping on with a thing when it's finished. With youth. With marriage . . . to go on when it doesn't exist any longer, when it's used up, instead of throwing dead emotions overboard and building up a decent, friendly neutrality. Pitiful. To go on with work, when there's nothing there. I suppose everybody comes to a moment of realization that forever frees us if we recognize it. . . . We're at that moment, Diana."

* * *

A country of hills. Low hills flung down like a crumpled cloth. Along the yellow-clay road that drove forward, were riotous patches of autumn woods, flame and amber, for there had been sharp frosts and the leaves, crisp and vivid, were spilled over the ground. A glimmer of sunlight poured through the thinning, transparent trees, shorn fields had been burnt and lay smudged, prickly with charred weeds, checkered with reddish blotches of plowed land. In the corners of the barbed-wire fences were clumps of golden-rod. Crows loitered and complained in the air. Where the road dipped, in the distance, the land had a look of tawny velvet, and further hills rolled southward, the

color of the blue November haze and almost as formless. This was a country an alien could like. It had an aspect of serenity and the air, stirred with a wind, was sharp and acrid, flavored with the scent of pines and frosty earth.

They had been driving for two days. Peniel Wayne, who had no one else, was following them by train in a fortnight, with their household goods. In six weeks' of dickering Kent had accomplished exactly what he had planned and they were leaving the *Anchorage Journal* to its new owners, who were, ostensibly, Painter and Sneed, and secretly a corporation to whom a string of papers through a state was an advantage. Through Henry Painter, Giles was kept as manager and Kurt Raedel, at this moment, probably, was sitting at Kent's desk; but the authority they had was barren. . . .

Diana was startled by the sound of her own curt chuckle and Kent said:

"We're close to Watsonville. We've made good time. You can see the town from the next ridge."

He slackened speed as they mounted, and came to a stop by a copse of pines, slim, wind-distorted trees, carving grotesque lines against the pallid sky. Below, the town lay in an undistinguished pocket of the country, under a pall of smoke. It had ugliness without dignity, yet with a harsh vigor, unsoftened by the farmlands that swept up to it. Huddled wooden houses made a thicket about the gaunt blast-furnace chimneys and a few blackened church steeples. Near the center of the veil of smoke, was the bronze dullness of a Square, and the red brick tower of a courthouse, lifting above its trees; beyond it, in widening circumferences lay the stark squalor of rolling mills and steel sheds and foundries, a tangle of glittering tracks and

rough roads black with cinders and slag. The wind bore a smell of soot and the sound of a faint steady pounding, reverberant and monotonous.

"There might be ten miles of concrete sidewalks?" Diana suggested.

"They claim twelve," said Kent; and seeing her smile, he flung back his head and laughed. "Pretty little mess, Diana, isn't it? Say you like it."

"I like it."

She sat still, her hands folded on her lap and that faint smile on her mouth. She thought irrelevantly: There was smoke as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened. Already, she knew what lay there, in that pocket of the earth, under its smoke. There would be the Square, dusty in the sun, with the Courthouse on one side and the straggling two-and three-story brick blocks, lining the others; and clustered in little streets about them, the cottages and bungalows of the workers and clerks in the mills, a few shining extravagant houses built by officials, a few old-fashioned mansions left over from plantation days. She knew that town. She knew its Puritanic code, taken rather too much from the Old Testament, its little hatreds, its tiny shocking sectarian feuds, its rancor and gossip. A town set down in an inferno of fire and smoke . . . a town like ten thousand other towns. . . .

She was to be its scribe. When the people in those huddled houses, evolved into intimates, different from all the other people in the world, she would, for a time, record their lives. Ephemeral pencilings, but shadowed by a story greater than the story they would make, touched by the beauty of the commonplace. Surely she could do it well, who had learned that though in the

beginning life was as lovely as green wheat, it could be ground down into bitter flour for bread. . . .

Kent had got out of the car and was fumbling with the trunk which held their bags at the back. There was a cabin beyond the pine-copse, built of timbers that had been charred with fire and had the ashy, blotched look of a drunkard's skin. Out of it strayed a line of pickaninnies, with guttural cries, to stare at Diana. The oldest laid her neck over a rough post like a foal at a gate, with the youngest in her arms, and directed at the low-slung car a soft gaze which extracted everything essential in its appearance.

Kent slid in behind the wheel and put a box on her lap. It was a long box, wrapped in silver paper, with the crest of a famous shop in the Rue de la Paix, embossed on one corner.

"I saw it in a shop window and I couldn't pass it by, Diana; but I forgot to give it to you, the first night. Then I kept it. For this moment, I think. Open it."

She broke a seal and lifted the lid. Within there was a square of rose-colored chiffon, with deep corners of silver embroidery. For an instant she crumpled it softly between her hands. Then she shook it wide and held it up for the row of little darkies to see.

"Glory to God," the oldest shouted. "Glory . . . glory . . . glory . . ."

Kent laughed.

"You ought to be kissed, Diana. But I find I can't before an audience. I'm too brand-new a husband. My dear, I'm happy. . . ."

She caught the shimmer of rose and silver about her throat, thinking, suddenly, of a tired sensitive boy who had told her, the first time, a legend of a rosy Veil of Maya. And she said:

"I'll need this, I expect. We'll have so much hard work . . . hard struggle . . ."

But as she said the word, "struggle," she felt the old exciting sense of hardship ahead, the love, stirring within her for living. She savored it with a mounting intensity. A new cycle was beginning. Movement, creation . . . what was living but that? Struggle. . . .

Kent turned the car down the hill. It gathered speed, carrying them swiftly toward the murky valley. He took a hand from the wheel and put it over Diana's.

"Put it on," he commanded, smiling at the road that stretched before them, sun-dappled, lined with its riotous trees and a shifting litter of soiled billboards, "you'd better pull it over your eyes, dear heart. I'm driving in."

THE END

MOB VIOLENCE SHAKES CITY

Sinister Effect of Terrorizing
Appalls Citizens

CLARENCE AND POLICE
HAVE ORDER

Scene of Horror
Community

The rising wave
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About to Consolidate

Anchorage (A. P.)—Unconfir-
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sibility of a combination of the

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Robert Wayne, Editor
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the Senate of the U

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